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Fishel, Anne Hopkins

FACTORS AFFECTING COPARENTAL RELATIONSHIPS

*The University of North Carolina at Greensboro*

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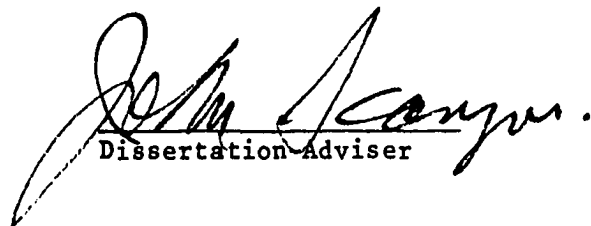
by

**Anne Hopkins Fishel**

A Dissertation Submitted to  
the Faculty of the Graduate School at  
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APPROVAL PAGE

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This study tested whether and how support and conflict in coparental relationships, as perceived by mothers, are influenced by selected context variables and the negotiation process engaged in by separated or divorced spouses. Fifty-one Caucasian women, separated no more than 26 months, selected by either random sampling or convenience methods, were interviewed by the researcher using a structured interview guide.

The process of decision making about the children as well as resulting perceptions of support and conflict within the coparental relationship were investigated, using a negotiation instrument developed by the researcher, and Ahrons's quality of coparental relationship scale. Reliability of the instruments was high.

The coparental relationships reflected more support than conflict. Multiple regression analyses revealed that the negotiation process was more predictive of support and conflict than were the context variables. Fifty-seven percent of the variability in coparental relationship support was explained while only 16 percent of the variability in coparental relationship conflict was explained. A high support relationship was characterized by successful negotiation first, followed by more frequent coparental discussions, mother's higher educational level, and fewer children. Conflict in the coparental relationship was affected by competitive negotiation first, followed by more children.

Thirty-one percent of the variability in negotiation style was explained; successful negotiation was related to father's spending



more time with the children, father's higher income, and a mutual desire to separate. A path analysis revealed that with one exception, negotiation style did not seem to alter the impact of the contextual variables on the support or conflict in coparental relationships.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The United States has a divorce rate of 5.1 per 1,000 population, the highest rate in the world (National Center for Health Statistics, 1983); divorce is one of the most discussed societal concerns in the United States, particularly in popular magazines such as Newsweek (Press & Clausen, 1983) and Redbook (Watts & Lapinski, 1983). Compared with other family phenomena, however, divorce has been infrequently studied (Kitson & Raschke, 1981).

#### Impact of Divorce on Children

When there are children, an essential criterion of a constructive divorce is that there be a constructive coparental relationship; it is particularly important that visitation and child support agreements be kept, and that unexpected contingencies concerning the children's welfare be handled with flexibility and good grace (Kressel, Lopez-Morillas, Weinglass, & Deutsch, 1979). Though many factors contribute to the child's adjustment, parental conflict is the only variable found to predict poorer adjustment in children (regardless of other variables) (Leupnitz, 1982). All six of the factors suggested by Kurdek (1981) that would minimize adjustment problems are based on the relationship between the parents. The stress of divorce for children is not due so much to living in a single-parent family, but to the way in which parents handle the divorce. How the parents relate to each



other appears to be the crucial variable in the quality of the coparental relationship. Marotz-Baden, Adams, Bueche, Munro and Munro (1979), after an extensive review of the literature, wrote

There is little evidence suggesting that divorce is directly related to negative developmental consequences for children. Rather, circumstances associated with poverty and conflict between parents in any family form seem to be contributing factors (p.8).

### Theoretical Focus

The research reported here focused on the relationship between parents, even though selected contextual variables were included. The need to study process issues in families has been well documented by leading family theorists such as Buckley (1967), Cromwell & Olson (1975), Holman & Burr (1980), and Scanzoni (1983). Process theory implies a changing, dynamic approach whereas static theory implies a fixed model. Process explains "how" events originate, how they are maintained, how they change and how they are dissolved, while a static theory only explains how they are maintained. For example, Parsons (1965) explained social order through the mechanisms of social control and socialization within the family. Conformity to norms insured an orderly society. Parsons believed that order was dependent on equilibrium, and that marriage was a commitment forever to socialize children. Those couples who sought divorce did not conform, were considered deviants and a problem for society.

Ellis (1971), in contrast to Parsons, postulated that the process approach brings about order: both sides (a couple) participate in creating their own norms or structures through negotiation. The negotiations often lead to fuller, more satisfying lives together.

The family is understood by looking at how the members interact in response to given situations. Social interaction, exchange, and conflict theories are all utilitarian approaches to the study of the family.

While the static or functionalist view used norms to ensure conformity, the utilitarian view tries to explain how change occurs in the family, and acknowledging that people perceive different meanings in situations, and that conflict and "deviancy" are the antithesis out of which new, more satisfying structures will occur. The utilitarian model predicts that when people are involved in decision-making and in determining their own life styles, families will be more satisfying.

Cromwell and Olson (1975) identified processes of interaction among family members during the various stages of discussion, decision-making, problem-solving, and conflict resolution as one of the most important areas as well as the weakest and least substantiated in research literature--both conceptually and operationally. Scanzoni (1983) has developed a model to study decision-making in families of today's society which is morphogenetic, constantly changing. Expecting families to revert back to a morphostatic model, à la Parsons, will cause even more disruption and discrepancy between families and society. New moral norms are necessary to explain family functioning today and the new norms appear through negotiations within the family.

### Problem Statement and Purposes of the Study

Examining the style of relating between separated or divorced parents and how the quality of their coparental relationship is affected by certain context and process variables was a central focus of this study. The assumption is that there are causal relationships among the three components of the model going from context to process to outcome. Negotiations occur within a context which also influences both the negotiation and the outcome of the coparental relationship. The conceptual model, described by Scanzoni and Polonko (1980), utilizes both contextual variables and process variables (such as negotiation style) to determine outcome decisions. The three purposes of the study were to

- (1) increase the substantive knowledge of the quality of parental relationships among separated or divorced parents and the degree of support and conflict inherent in those relationships, as well as of the processes of negotiation which occur in the relationships;
- (2) investigate the validity, reliability, and unidimensionality of scales measuring the quality of coparental relationships (particularly assessing the existence of two subscales, support and conflict), and the negotiation process (particularly examining the sub-processes of cooperation and competition);
- (3) develop and test a conceptual model, based on Scanzoni and Polonko (1980), which examines relationships among context variables, process of negotiation, and the quality of the coparental relationship of separated or divorced parents.

### Preliminary Hypotheses

Relative to the third purpose of the study, several hypotheses will be tested. Some of the hypothesis tests are dependent upon preliminary results related to the methodological investigations in the early stages of the study. Caveats which will be used to alter the hypotheses depending on the unidimensionality of the scales are also discussed.

Hypothesis 1: The context variables of socioeconomic status, nontraditional gender role preference, and internal locus of control will be positively related to successful negotiation. (If the process scale of negotiation is not unidimensional, hypothesis 1 will be altered to account for the two or more variables which will be created from the scale.)

Hypothesis 2: Higher quality coparental relationships will be positively related to socioeconomic status, a nontraditional gender role preference, and internal locus of control. (If the quality of coparental relationship scale is not unidimensional, but instead contains two subscales of support and conflict, hypothesis 2 will be divided into two hypotheses for empirical testing.)

Hypothesis 3: Successful negotiation style (high cooperation, low competitiveness) will be positively related to quality of coparental relationships.

Hypothesis 4: The process of negotiation style will be more predictive of quality of coparental relationships than will be the context variables.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Divorce Rates

In this century, the divorce rate in the United States increased until after the end of World War II, reaching a rate of 4.3 divorces per 1,000 total population in 1946 (Spanier & Glick, 1981). The postwar upsurge subsided by 1950, and in 1958 reached the lowest level since 1940. In the 1960's the divorce rate began to rise again and exceeded the previous all-time high within ten years. The divorce rate leveled off between 1975 and 1977, increased in 1980 and 1981, to an unprecedented high of 5.3 divorces per 1,000 population (National Center for Health Statistics, 1981), and then began another slight decline. The latest figures show a rate of 5.1 per 1,000 population (National Center for Health Statistics, 1983). The census bureau predicts that about 38% of women, ages 25 to 29 in 1975, may eventually end their first marriages in divorce (Spanier & Glick, 1981).

The incidence of separation and divorce is higher for black women than for white women (Norton & Glick, 1979). Most divorce statistics report that there are more divorces among people in low status occupations, among people with less education, and among those with low income. Recently, however, the rate of divorce among the upper

strata of society has increased so that the social class differential is declining (Kitson & Raschke, 1981).

The largest proportion of divorces occurs in the early years of marriage among childless couples, with the peak period in the second year of marriage, after which the rate drops rapidly. Another peak period is after the children leave home. A recent trend reflects higher rates of divorce among women married ten years or longer (Messinger & Walker, 1981). Women who marry in their teens are twice as likely to divorce as those who marry in their 20s (Norton & Glick, 1979).

The rising divorce rate has caused a steady rise in the number of children of divorce, and women continue to retain custody in more than 90% of divorces (Weitzman, 1981). While in 1948, 42% of divorcing couples had children, by 1966 this figure was 62%. Since 1968, the percentage of divorcing couples with children and the average number of children per couple have been decreasing. In 1977, 50% of divorcing couples had children and the mean number of children per couple had dropped--from 1.28 in 1968 to .87 in 1977 (Weitzman, 1981). The rising divorce rate, however, has caused a steady rise in the absolute number of children of divorce. Currently, more than one million minor children are involved in divorce each year in the U.S. (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1979).

#### Explanations for Rising Divorce Rates

The changing roles of men and women are a major factor in the upsurge of divorce. Scanzoni (1979) found a relationship between changes in the bargaining power of men and women and higher rates of

marital dissolution. As women have increased their economic resources through employment, they have also gained bargaining power in the marital relationship. When the rewards for maintaining a relationship are lower and the costs higher than those available in another relationship or by living alone, divorce is likely (Kitson & Raschke, 1981). This perspective--social exchange theory--is currently the most common explanation for divorce (Albrecht & Kunz, 1980; Federico, 1979; Kitson, Holmes & Sussman, 1983; Levinger, 1979; Nye, 1979; Scarzoni, 1978, 1979).

Exchange theory is concerned with rewards and costs, which may be either social, psychological, or economic. Nye (1979) reported that each person makes choices after weighing the rewards and costs. Investment in relationships is maintained if the rewards or attractions--affection, intimacy, communication, understanding, security--are perceived to be greater than the costs of or barriers to getting into other relationships (Albrecht & Kunz, 1980; Levinger, 1979). Barriers to divorce include feelings of obligations to others, concern about effects of divorce on children, fears about community reactions, religion, morals, and money. People ask, "Is my situation better or worse than what might be available if I were single or remarried?"

With women increasingly able to support themselves economically, they are less willing to remain in unsatisfying marriages. The higher divorce rates in the last ten years have also been stimulated by a growing acceptance of the principle that divorce is a reasonable alternative to an unhappy marriage (Halem, 1980; Kitson & Raschke,

1981; Norton and Glick, 1979). Scanzoni (1979) views divorce as a safety valve providing a formal exit from conflictual marriage; without it, he speculated that the desertion rate would increase, as was the situation during Colonial times in America. A conflict-ridden intact family is more deleterious to family members than is a stable home with divorced parents (Anderson, H. & Anderson, G., 1981; Bilge & Kaufman, 1983; Hetherington, 1979; Lazarus, 1981; Nye, 1957).

While negative sanctions about divorce have diminished, so too have legal constraints. Major reforms have taken place in the laws governing divorce. In the past decade most states in the U. S. have adopted some form of no-fault divorce laws--laws which clearly establish the individual's right to decide when and why a marriage should be dissolved (Weitzman, 1981). By 1980, only two states, Illinois and South Dakota, had not adopted a no-fault option for divorce.

#### Process of Becoming Divorced

Ahrons (1980) suggests that rather than dissolving the family, divorce creates the need to develop a new equilibrium over time, with specific structural and behavioral rules for a binuclear family system. The divorced spouses must be able to disengage from spousal roles and redefine parental roles. The process involved in restructuring the binuclear family system may be one of the most important variables in determining the outcome of the divorce for family members.

Divorce is almost always an effort to handle unresolved conflict. Conflict resolution occurs when there is a renegotiation of



obligations and gratifications. When the conflict is resolved by divorce, the divorce negotiations can lead to order and a much less stressful life with opportunities for new relationships, or the people may be so devastated as to suffer from permanent low self-esteem, guilt, and anxiety. The end result of divorce depends in part on the process or the way in which the couple handles the various decision-making stages. Kressel (1980) described four stages in the divorce process, discussed below.

#### Pre Divorce Decision Period

Increased unresolved conflict leads to increasing marital dissatisfaction and tension. This is often followed by attempts at reconciliation and later by a clear decline in marital intimacy. Albrecht (1980) reported that the most difficult period was before the decision to divorce. Almost half the women in his sample characterized the divorce experience as "stressful but bearable." In another study, women reported significantly more severe psychological symptoms than men prior to separation though men reported more in the early post separation period (Chiriboga, Roberts & Stein, 1979). During the predivorce decision period, there is a break in the facade of marital solidarity, open fighting occurs, and the two parties contact lawyers. Some couples stay in this phase for indefinite time periods with a mean time of 14 months (Kressel, Jaffee, Luckman, Watson, & Deutsch, 1980).

The decision to terminate an unhappy marriage by obtaining a divorce is almost never easy for either spouse. Both men and women have reported that women more often made the decision to separate

(Zeiss, A., Zeiss, R., & Johnson, 1980). Weiss (1975) said that most separations come about only after a long and anguished process of mutual alienation from which both partners emerge bruised, their morales depleted, their self-esteem low, and their ability to function damaged by the varied assaults of the failing marriage. The decision is based most often on lack of communication and conflicts over family responsibility and roles.

#### Decision Phase

The decision to divorce is firmly made by at least one partner. This is a time of relief followed by anxiety, then renewed intimacy, then fighting, and finally, acceptance of the inevitability of divorce. Federico (1979) discussed the concept of no return as the point at which a marital partner decides he or she cannot return to the previous emotional investment in the marriage. The costs have exceeded the gains to such an extent that there has been a psychological "click off." This person appears impelled to commit acts that build even more distance into the relationship and dissatisfaction with the marriage. The provoker may have little or no awareness of this process. According to social-exchange theory, the provoker is lowering the gains and/or raising the cost of the marriage. The provokee initially chooses to accommodate, but this in turn invites more provocation until finally the provokee reaches the point of no return and wants out.

Albrecht and Kunz (1980) identified infidelity and lack of love as the problems most frequently identified in the decision to divorce. Men mentioned financial and sexual problems and trouble with in-laws

more often than women, and women cited physical abuse, alcohol, and neglect of children as reasons. Women reported more marital complaints than men and women were more likely to blame their spouse than were men, while men were more likely to blame themselves (Kitson & Sussman, 1982).

#### Period of Negotiation

This is the complex, critical third period during which custody, visitation rights, child support, alimony and division of property are decided. The difficulties of the negotiation period are a function of four factors: the partners' emotional state, their level of naiveté as negotiators, the relative scarcity of divisible resources, and the degree of discrepancy in relative power between husbands and wives. Dysfunctional styles of interaction which have characterized the marriage do not disappear during settlement negotiations. Any negotiation is more difficult when one party exceeds the other in its access to and knowledge about existing tangible resources (Rubin & Brown, 1975). Wives who have given up college or a career for the role of homemaker most often are found in this less powerful position.

The emotional ambivalence of the parties about the divorce may be a serious impediment to rational negotiation (Kressel et al., 1980). Anger, humiliation, grief, jealousy, and guilt are among the powerful emotions that may compete with the spouses' desire to end the marriage. The one who is least accepting of the idea of divorce will usually make unrealistic demands, and frequently these demands are expressed as the needs of the children.

### Period of Re-equilibration

In this fourth phase, if the coping has been successful, the coparental relationship will be handled smoothly and tactfully on both sides. However, relatively high degrees of conflict probably continue, particularly around issues of child care and child support (Kressel, 1980). Female single parents have a severe economic and emotional burden in childrearing. In 1975, only 14% received alimony, 44% received child support but less than half of these (21%) collected child support regularly--and even then it was usually inadequate (Seiden, 1976). Lasting conflict is easily measured by the number of divorced parents who have returned to court for relitigation of child custody issues. Ilfeld, Ilfeld, and Alexander (1982) examined 414 consecutive custody cases in an Los Angeles court over a two year period. Returns to court consisted of 16% of the joint custody and 32% of exclusive custody families. Ahrons (1981) found that 48% of her sample of divorced parents planned to return to court.

### Coparental Relationship

The coparental relationship was defined by Bohannon (1971) as a relationship between both parents that permits them to continue their childrearing obligations and responsibilities after divorce. "Coparental" refers to the psychodynamics of a relationship, not the legal definition of custody (Messinger & Walker, 1981).

The relationship between former spouses who coparent has emerged as a critical variable in understanding postdivorce family functioning (Goldsmith, 1981). There is consensus that a successful coparental

relationship involves mutual support and cooperation between former spouses, but little is known about the ideal kind of interaction with regard to frequency and content.

In a random sample of divorced "mother custody couples" interviewed at home, Goldsmith (1981) found that 84% of the former spouses maintained a continuing relationship. However, three-quarters described their relationship as conflictual in the area of child rearing. Men whose former spouses had decided to divorce reported significantly less satisfaction with the coparental relationship than men who had made the decision themselves. Common problems reported by both sexes were disagreements and arguments about raising children, problems with how the other parent "used" the child (e.g., as a go-between or to get back at the other parent), problems with how the other parent related to the child, problem with former spouse's personality, living arrangements (cohabiting), and competition with the other parent. Only 13% reported that their coparenting relationship was supportive almost all of the time (Goldsmith, 1981).

At two months following divorce, relations with the former spouse and children have been found to be the most salient and preoccupying concern for divorced parents (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1979). Most (66%) of the exchanges between divorced couples in this period, said Hetherington, involve conflicts. The most common areas of conflict include finances, support, visitation, and childrearing.

Kurdek and Blisk (1983) reported that the relationship with the former spouse was the area causing most problems after separation. The reason for the contact revolved around the children and involved

some degree of conflict. The majority of contacts were occasions for argument (30.4% frequently had arguments and 26.1% always). Most mothers had fairly regular contact with their ex-spouses. Twenty-four percent saw them once a week, 24% once a month, and only 8% never saw them.

The most extensive research on the coparental relationship has been reported by Ahrons (1980, 1981, 1983), who did in-depth, semistructured interviews, lasting from 1.5 to 2.5 hours, in subjects' homes. Her sample of 108 divorced parents (54 pairs of former spouses) was randomly selected from the 1977 divorce court records in Dave County, Wisconsin. Ahrons collected data on the frequency of coparental interaction, the content of coparental interaction, and the quality of coparental communication. From her research, she developed a scale to measure quality of coparental relationships. The "quality of coparental communication" scale consisted of two subscales: conflict and support. Ahrons' sample had been divorced for approximately one year, and the mothers had court-awarded custody. All of the couples were Caucasian and predominantly middle class.

In Ahrons's study, 85% of the divorced spouses continued to maintain some kind of direct contact with each other one year after the divorce. The majority had telephone conversations at least once a month, while over a third had weekly telephone interaction. Most of the couples (66%) also discussed child-related issues in person--usually when the fathers picked up or returned the children home.

Well over half of Ahrons's sample discussed major decisions with some regularity (e.g., changes in school, dental, and medical

decisions), but less than a third shared day-to-day decisions. The items least often discussed were also those most frequently cited by subjects as generating conflicts: financial issues and discussions of the children's reactions and adjustment to the divorce.

Fathers saw themselves as more involved in sharing day-to day decisions and in discussing children's personal problems than mothers thought they were. Only 63% of the fathers and 52% of the mothers were either satisfied or very satisfied with the amount of shared childrearing. To assess the extent of their disagreements, subjects were asked if they planned to return to court in an attempt to resolve their differences. Forty-eight percent of the couples intended litigation.

About 50% of the sample perceived their relationship to be conflictual at least some of the time, with 34% of the women and 21% of the men often or always perceiving their relationship as conflictual. Many reported that they attempted to avoid conflictual issues by not talking about some of their differences, especially in the areas of childrearing practices and values (Ahrons, 1981). Almost two-thirds of the sample perceived their relationship as supportive at least some of the time, with almost half of both men and women reporting supportive relationships often or always. Men perceived less conflict and more support than women, though this difference was not significant (Ahrons, 1981).

About one-fourth of the subjects reported that they were dissatisfied with the quality of their coparental relationship. But when asked to compare their present relationship with that at the time

of separation, 64% of the women and 52% of the men reported that the relationship was better at one year post divorce than at the time they separated (Ahrons, 1981).

The group of parents who shared childrearing most also interacted most frequently, shared more in nonparental interactions, and perceived their relationship as mutually supportive with minimal conflict. The parents who very rarely or never shared childrearing decisions were more conflictual and significantly less supportive of each other (Ahrons, 1981). Ahrons reported in a later study (1983) that the most important predictor of fathers' involvement was the amount that the parents shared about childrearing. The second most important predictor was the mother's attitude toward the father as a parent.

Ellison (1983) examined the relationship of parental harmony to the psychosocial adjustment of school aged children from married and divorced families, through in-depth interviews with mothers, fathers, and a child in the family between the ages of 8 and 12 years. Her convenience sample consisted of ten divorced families and ten married families. Two rating scales, one to measure degree of parental harmony and one to measure children's psychosocial adjustment, were devised from a preliminary content analysis of the interview data. The Parental Harmony Scale for parents' interview data comprised nine binary-choice items regarding the effectiveness of communication between the parents about school and disciplinary matters, level of agreement on childrearing matters, the usual ways of settling disagreements, and overall assessment of the other parent's



performance as a parent. There were no statistically significant differences in children's psychosocial adjustment scores according to family type. There was, however, a significant positive correlation between the divorced parents' assessment of parental harmony and their children's assessment of their own psychosocial adjustment (Ellison, 1983).

The most striking characteristic of those divorced couples rated as having high parental harmony was their conscious decision to overcome their marital difficulties in order to meet their parenting responsibilities (Ellison, 1983). Divorced parents rated as having low parental harmony pointed to the poor quality of their relationship while married, as well as current events in their lives, as antecedents of their lower scores. Current life events such as remarriage or increased career demands often interfered with a divorced couple's intention to maintain a harmonious coparenting relationship. Some of the divorced couples also developed very creative approaches to dealing with their inability to coparent successfully. Three of the five divorced families having low parental harmony used other individuals such as a relative to mediate between the divorced father and mother. In some of the families, a coparenting relationship seemed to emerge between the first and the second wife.

A continuing healthy relationship between divorced parents is a crucial factor in the child's postdivorce adjustment (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1977). More than three-fourths of divorced parents maintain contact, but more than half of those report their relationship to be

conflictual--especially in the area of childrearing (Abarbanel, 1979; Ahrons, 1981; Goldsmith, 1981; Hetherington, 1979; Kurdek & Blisk, 1983).

### Children's Reactions to Parental Divorce

Ahrons (1981) suggested that the major custody issue is not who will parent, or whether parents can continue to share parenting successfully, but how they can do so. The continuation of meaningful attachment bonds between parents and children can decrease major stresses associated with the complex process of family change (Ahrons, 1980).

Margaret Mead (1970) once said that one of the major shortcomings of the system of divorce is

the failure to provide some kind of viable relationship between parents who are no longer married to each other so that there may be a continuing relationship between the child and both parents, and so that the child's identity is not shattered by divorce (p. 110).

Others have said that a continuing relationship between divorced parents is a crucial factor in the child's postdivorce adjustment (Abarbanel, 1979; Ahrons, 1981; Goldsmith, 1981; Messinger and Walker, 1981; Suarez, Weston, & Hartstein, 1978; Kressel, 1980; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1974, 1975, & 1976).

Divorce changes a child's life profoundly. It is like being inside a kaleidoscope; although the elements are the same, the pattern of their life has become scrambled (Hancock, 1980). While living in a stable home with divorced parents is much less deleterious for children than remaining in a conflict ridden intact family (Nye, 1957), almost all children experience the transition to divorce as

painful (Hetherington, 1979). The most common early responses of children to divorce are anger, fear, depression, and guilt (Hetherington, 1979). More data exist about the crisis period than about long-term effects. Of 131 children studied five years after a divorce, 34% were doing especially well psychologically, 29% were in the middle range, and 37% were intensely unhappy (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). The high percentage of intensely unhappy children should alert professionals to the urgent need to do something to improve the coparental relationship. The child's adjustment depends on age and sex at the time of separation, pre-separation family life, and the post-divorce adjustments of parents (Abarbanel, 1979).

Infants are seen as being affected largely through the emotional state of their caregiver--usually the mother (Kurdek, 1981). Preschoolers are often viewed as the most vulnerable group of children because they are less able to accurately appraise the divorce situation. They may experience nightmares, depressed play, eating disturbances, bed-wetting, problems with sexual identity, and guilt over having "caused" the divorce (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1975, 1980).

The most commonly occurring problems of adolescents are subjective psychological problems, academic problems, and aggression toward parents (Kalter & Rembar, 1981). Adolescent girls of divorce have been found to exhibit high incidences of alcohol and drug involvement as well as sexually acting out behavior. Besides developmental status, gender has been related to children's divorce adjustment. Boys show a higher rate of behavior disorders and problems in interpersonal relations at home and at school than do

girls (Hetherington, 1979; Kurdek, 1981). Hansen (1984) found that adolescent children's mental health was strongly linked to parents' overall health and mental health, parents' self-esteem, and parents' life stress. Communication, as measured by the Family Interaction Schedule proved to be highly correlated with the mental health of parents and overall health and mental health of children.

The functioning of the divorced parent is the central determinant of the young child's well-being. The only variable which has been shown to predict poorer adjustment in children (regardless of other variables) is parental conflict (Leupnitz, 1982). Adjustment problems are unlikely to occur if children experience minimal depletion of money, low interparent conflict preceding and after divorce, high agreement between parents in childrearing and discipline, approved love along with consistent time spent with both parents, and an emotional climate facilitating children's discussion of divorce-related concerns (Kurdek, 1981).

#### Factors Affecting Divorce Adjustment

While the literature on factors affecting the quality of the coparental relationship is sparse, factors affecting divorce adjustment in general were used in formulating hypotheses for the area of concern of this study.

#### Gender

As noted earlier, women experience more stress during divorce than men. This difference, however, is influenced by economic resources, custody of children, and early socialization patterns--all of which are gender linked.

### Children

The financial and emotional strains associated with the presence of children may explain why in some studies, presence of children is inversely related to adjustment (Kitson & Raschke, 1981). Divorced women had greater adjustment problems when there were three or more children present (Pearlin & Johnson, 1977) or when the number of male children was greater (Berman & Tuck, 1981). Weiss (1975) suggested that the responsibility for children may help keep the parent going. Some children could be assets, others a drain, but little research has attempted to sort this out.

### Length of Separation

In general, the longer the couple have been separated, the better the adjustment (Kitson & Raschke, 1981). Spivey and Sherman (1980) compared four divorced groups of women (with different time spans since filing for the divorce) with a newly married group of women and a control married group. The 0-6 months divorced group and the newly married groups showed significantly higher stress. The women who had filed for divorce three and one-half years ago or more were similar to the control married group. Divorced women become no different from continuously married women in later life adjustment.

### Socioeconomic Status

The more economically independent individuals are, particularly if they are women, the better their adjustment and the more internal is their locus of control (Kitson & Raschke, 1981; Spanier & Custo, 1979). Goode (1956) found a higher degree of adjustment after divorce among women who could depend on regular child support payments and had

a full-time job as compared to those without financial security. Pett (1982) found that both the family's current social status and whether there was income from a job (instead of welfare) were significant predictors of adjustment among divorced single parents (89% of whom were female). Higher educational attainment of women enhanced their adjustment (Thompson & Spanier, 1983).

After interviewing both divorced and married mothers at two income levels, Colletta (1983) concluded that income was the key factor in explaining stress. While some stresses were higher in divorced families even when income was not an issue, by and large the low-income divorced mothers reported the highest levels of stress. High levels of stress were significantly associated with mothers being more demanding and restrictive with their children.

In 1982, 46% of the female-headed families in the United States had incomes below the poverty level (47% in 1974) (United States Bureau of the Census, 1984). Low levels of child support and public assistance, and the continuing effects of sexism in hiring women and in wages paid to women have contributed to this economic deprivation (President's Commission, Vol. III, 1978).

### Social Support

Involvement in social activities and expression of feelings have been found to be positively related to postdivorce adjustment (Berman & Tuck, 1981). Pett (1982) found that satisfaction with social supports and the quality of relationships with significant others were also significant factors in adjustment. Higher dating activity was related to higher adjustment (Rose & Price-Bonham, 1973). However,

the current relationship with the ex-husband was the best predictor of divorcees' adjustment (Nelson, 1981).

### Psychological Resources

Of the areas of change necessitated by divorce as identified by Bohannon (1971), psychic divorce is always the last and the most difficult. Successful completion of the process of psychic separation is often considered to be the primary criterion for adjustment (Kressel & Deutsch, 1977). Each person must turn him/herself into an autonomous social individual. This process is more difficult for people who married to avoid becoming autonomous-- which describes a large percentage of women. Learning to live without somebody to lean on or to support is indeed difficult for many people.

Weiss (1975) attributes much of the distress during separation and the decision to divorce to the "attachment bond," which is similar to the attachment described by Bowlby (1969). There persists after the end of most marriages, whether they were happy or unhappy, whether their disruption was sought for or not, a sense of bonding to the spouse. Many feel anxious, fearful or terrified, both when contemplating a prospective separation from the spouse and when experiencing the spouse's absence (Weiss, 1975). Just as comfort and a sense of security tend to be associated with accessibility of the attachment figure, so distress tends to be associated with that person's inaccessibility. Separation distress is marked by a focusing of attention on the lost spouse, together with intense discomfort because of the spouse's inaccessibility. Because of the discomfort and frustration, the separated person is readily angered. Weiss

described the syndrome as characterized by tension and vigilance which often cause difficulties in sleeping. Other expressions of tension may include appetite loss, compulsive nibbling, irritability, sudden tears, and an inability to concentrate. Separation, says Weiss, often produces episodes of deep sadness alternating with euphoria related to a new freedom and a feeling of being able to cope by oneself.

Loneliness is a persistent and painful feeling.

Divorced people are more likely to have symptoms of physical and psychological disturbances than all other marital status groups except the unhappily married (Kitson & Raschke, 1981). Masuda and Holmes (1967) found divorce to be the second highest predictor (behind death of a spouse) of life change leading to illness. In a study by Dasteel (1982), 91% of a divorced sample reported experiencing an unusual degree of stress, and almost half of the divorcing population had depression scores on the MMPID as high as hospitalized patients (Dasteel, 1982).

Studying married, separated and divorced persons, Pearlín and Johnson (1977) found depression to be greatest among separated people. Griffith (1983) (comparing the health problems of women who were single, married, separated, divorced and widowed), found that separated women reported significantly more physical and emotional symptoms than the other groups. Sixty-nine percent were restless and over 40% had upset stomachs, malaise/weakness, frequent headaches and trouble sleeping. Over 60% reported feeling frequently nervous/tense, anxious, unable to cope, irritable or angry, fat or overweight, sad or depressed and often lonely. A higher percentage of these women than



other women used unhealthy coping patterns such as alcohol, isolation, denial, ignoring and drugs. They were less likely to use healthy coping patterns such as work, exercise, recreation, religion, and new involvements. Yet the separated women were most likely of all the groups to use talking--a healthy coping style.

Spanier and Casto (1979) found that not wanting a divorce, as well as sudden and unexpected separation, resulted in lower adjustment to the divorce. Acceptance among women of marital termination was clearly linked to recollection of marital discord and low affectional expression in the final months of marriage.

Internal resources such as higher religiosity and a subjective feeling of well being, also affect adjustments. The strongest single predictor of adjustment in one study was the woman's subjective feelings of well-being (Pett, 1982). Persons who achieved the best adjustment to divorce scored significantly higher on measures of self-assurance, dominance/assertiveness, intelligence, creativity, imagination, social boldness, liberation, self-sufficiency, ego strength and tranquility (Thomas, 1982).

Several studies have found nontraditional gender role attitudes in divorced women to be related to better adjustment (Brown & Manela, 1978; Carter, 1981; Keith & Schafar, 1982). When correlates of depression were examined among single parent employed women, economic and domestic deficits attributed to single parents were less important predictors of depression than was a traditional sex-role orientation (Keith & Schafar, 1982). Brown, Perry, and Harburg (1977) have suggested that women who hold nontraditional sex role attitudes (or

whose attitudes become more nontraditional during the process of divorce) experience less distress, more well-being and personal growth, higher self-esteem, and a greater sense of personal effectiveness than women who maintain traditional sex role attitudes. No relationship between sex role ideology and psychological outcomes during divorce has been seen among black women (Brown et al., 1977). From interviews of 200 women, Herman (1977), however, found evidence that for white women the emotional stress of separation and divorce is compounded by inadequate role development which prevents their subsequent integration into the economic, legal, political and social structures of society.

#### Process of Decision-making

Dividing the assets of a marriage equitably between the two parties is a difficult task, but dividing the children is impossible (Anderson & Anderson, 1981; Duncan & Duncan, 1979). The process of resolving conflicts about how to share and take care of children is an important aspect in the decisions that ex-spouses with children have to make during a divorce.

Gulliver (1979) mentions the two most common modes of resolving conflict--negotiation and adjudication. In negotiations, two people (or sets of people) exchange information and opinion, engage in argument and discussion, and sooner or later propose offers and counteroffers relating to the issues in the dispute between them, seeking an outcome acceptable to both sides. In negotiations, a decision is made by the disputing parties themselves which may produce a joint decision (Gulliver, 1979). With adjudication, in contrast,

two partners face an adjudicator. They address him or her, offering information, opinion, and argument. Each seeks to refute the other's presentation and to persuade the adjudicator to favor his own case. Eventually the adjudicator pronounces; it is the adjudicator who decides.

Divorced parents may either get together and negotiate to make decisions, or if the parents can come to no agreement, the court makes the decision (Anderson & Anderson, 1981). In some divorce cases, the judge acts as adjudicator and makes decisions about property settlements--including children. There are several problems that arise in the adjudication process. It results in a win-lose battle, and really everybody loses (Duncan & Duncan, 1979), though the child who becomes the prize probably suffers most. The legal process (adjudication) of deciding which one of the parents shall have the children may contribute to the distress felt by both parents and children.

Indeed, as now practiced, adversarial divorce, with all its stress on fault, retaliation, win and loss, has no positive benefits for the contestants, according to Irving (1980). Some say the adversary process predisposes divorced parents to greater hostility (Derdeyn, 1975).

Further, judges make decisions on matters outside their training. In the majority of cases there is a great deal of conflict, pain and loss for the entire family, which must be attributed to the antiquated and bizarre way we go about ending a marriage in our society. The lack of success of adversarial decisions is reflected in the number of

families who return to court for continued litigation. Cline and Westman (1971) reported that 52% of their sample returned to court at least once and 31% returned two to ten times within a two year follow-up period.

There are negative effects of marital conflict on children's adjustment. If, however, the conflict continues after the divorce, either openly or in more subtle ways, the child is also likely to experience adjustment problems. Many couples who resort to the adjudication process continue to use the child to express their hostilities (Anderson & Anderson, 1981; Duncan & Duncan, 1979; Suarez et al., 1978; Young, 1980).

Joint custody has been found to be a beneficial arrangement for many divorced parents because it also reduces parental conflict (Ilfeld, et al., 1982). The less people depend on the legal system to make decisions surrounding the divorce process, the better their adjustment.

Recent research emphasizes that the child's adjustment depends on a number of factors; however, the most critical factors in adjustment are minimal conflict between the parents and maximum agreement about child rearing (Abarbanel, 1979). Thus, the effects of divorce on children are a result of the way custody arrangements are traditionally practiced, and are not inherent in the divorcing process (Roman, 1978).

Regardless of who has initiated the idea, both partners must come to accept divorce as necessary and desirable; negotiation of terms should be conducted actively by both spouses and in a self-interested

but cooperative spirit. Kressel et al. (1979) add that failure of one or both partners to take an active negotiating stance suggests psychological nonacceptance of the divorce or guilt about it. The consequences of such passivity are that the final divorce settlement, arranged by lawyers or the courts, will not be based on a sense of psychological ownership and may not adequately reflect realistic needs or wishes.

As noted above, the adversary system often creates more problems than it solves. Both the quality of divorce settlements and the degree to which spouses keep their agreements are low (Kressel et al., 1979). The adversary system should be a last resort (Irving, 1980). When coparenting negotiations break down, an alternative is mediation, in which divorcing spouses negotiate directly with one another with the help of a trained third party. The advantages of mediation over adversarial processes include a better opportunity for their needs to emerge and be accommodated during negotiation; an increase in their sense of competence and mastery; the development of skills dealing with one another, which will be of value in the post-divorce period; the creation of a greater sense of competence and mastery; the creation of a greater sense of "ownership" of the agreement and hence an increased probability of adherence to it; and an appreciable reduction in legal fees (Kressel et al., 1979).

A study of conciliation counseling with over 400 families revealed that approximately 70% of the families who were referred for conciliation worked out an agreement without going to trial (Irving, 1981). The majority of the cases reached agreement with fewer than

six sessions. Furthermore, follow-up some three to four months later revealed that 80% of those who had reached an agreement had either fully or partially maintained the original agreement.

The goals of negotiation are for maximum joint profits for the whole family (Nye, 1979; Irving, 1980; Kressel, 1980; Kressel and Deutsch, 1977). If both partners have been active participants, this promotes a sense of ownership of the settlement, increasing the likelihood that whatever agreements are reached will be honored (Kressel and Deutsch, 1977).

Zartman (1976) has said that ours is an age of negotiation. The fixed positions and solid values of the past seem to be giving way, and new rules, roles, and relations have to be worked out. Indeed, that is true of the family system today. New rules, roles, and relations have to be negotiated in the divorced family. Flexibility is a basic feature of Zartman's ideas about negotiation because, in negotiation, both parties win. Parents and children win by determining ways to continue parent-child relationships constructively.

#### Conceptual Model

Scanzoni and Polonko (1980) have described a conceptual approach to marital negotiation which incorporates a three-stage model: social context, processes, and outcomes. They propose that social context variables influence bargaining strategies and bargaining. Subsequently, both context and process variables affect outcome, in the direction either of consensus or of dissensus. Current

negotiations are influenced by prior bargaining and provide the context for future renegotiations.

Unresolved conflicts often haunt the coparental interactions of separated couples. Since a large majority of these couples must continue to interact about parenting issues, it is important to gain more knowledge of how context variables and process variables (negotiation style) influence the coparental relationship in separated couples.

Scanzoni and Polonko (1980) identify four clusters of context variables:

1. compositional variables (race, ages of spouses, length of marriage, first marriage or remarriage, numbers and ages of children, other interested parties being represented, time frame);
2. resource variables (education, job status, income, hours worked per week, weeks worked per year, negotiation skills);
3. bargaining power orientation (self-esteem, sex-role preferences, stakes in the outcome, and importance of the issue;
4. actors' orientations regarding other's past bargaining behaviors (such as cooperation, trust, feeling understood, feeling resentment).

The negotiation process involves at least three levels of bargaining (Scanzoni & Polonko, 1980). As long as the tactics used to resolve conflicts consist of verbal persuasion, parties are likely to maintain a spirit of conciliation, minimization of differences, and enhancement of mutual understanding and good will. Deutsch (1973) labeled this pattern, "cooperative bargaining." If cooperative type

bargaining does not succeed, the strategies will probably escalate and become competitive; these are labeled "competitive/coercive".

Examples of this pattern are anger, shouting, name-calling, depreciation, withholding of information, lying, refusing to discuss, pouting, seeking to impose guilt or telling the other to shut up. If the conflict escalates, violence may occur. Examples of this are slapping, hitting, pushing, shoving, beating, kicking, and scratching.

Most competitive/coercive strategies will tend to escalate the conflict (Scanzoni and Polonko, 1980). If the couple can stay with "verbal persuasion tactics" (reasoning used by one person to try to get the other to make certain shifts in his/her position(s), then cooperative bargaining will take place (Scanzoni & Polonko, 1980). If these tactics do not succeed in arriving at an equitable solution, then bargaining strategies escalate and become competitive and perhaps violent.

Unresolved conflict is painful for both separated couples and their children. Negotiation holds promise for more successful family organization and equilibrium, and a higher quality of coparental relationships during and following a divorce.

The outcome of negotiations is dependent on both social context variables and negotiation process (Scanzoni & Polonko, 1980). The central focus of this study then was to examine how the support and conflict aspects of the coparental relationship of separated persons, as perceived by women, are influenced by selected context variables and a process variable, negotiation.



### CHAPTER III

#### METHODS

This study was designed to determine whether and how the quality of coparental relationships, as perceived by mothers, are influenced by selected context variables (socioeconomic, gender role preference, and locus of control) and the negotiation process engaged in by separated spouses. Data were collected in structured interviews with separated/newly divorced female parents. Chi-square,  $t$ -tests, factor analysis, alpha coefficients, Pearson's correlations, multiple regression and path analysis were used to analyze data.

#### Respondents

The study sample was made up of 51 women living in Durham, Orange, Chatham, and Wake counties in North Carolina. The number was kept low in order to do personal interviews. A random sample of 25 recently divorced women were selected from the county court records of Durham county. Also, a convenience sample of 26 recently separated women who were referred from other respondents and colleagues were included.

Criteria for inclusion in the study included being female, white, separated at least one month but not more than 26 months, with no debilitating physical, emotional, or cognitive problems, having spent time talking with the ex-spouse about child care and custody decisions, and having at least one child between the ages of three and

junior high school age. The age limits were imposed to increase the probability of father involvement, since fathers are less apt to be involved with very young children (Hill & Stafford, 1980), and parenting decisions are less frequent with high school age children.

There were 834 divorces granted in Durham County, N.C. in the year preceding data collection for this study. To acquire the random sampled group, a list of 206 names of women who appeared to meet the study criteria was compiled from the Durham County court records. From this list, every other name was chosen. The odd-numbered names (as decided by a coin toss) for each of the 13 months were used --totaling 108 names. Further search of actual court dockets and additional information gathered in telephone contacts made it necessary to eliminate 37 names because the women did not in fact meet the criteria for inclusion. (They were separated too long, their children were too old or too young, or they were nonwhite). This left 71 eligible cases.

An initial attempt was made to contact each of the 71 women by telephone, using a standard format to explain the study, screen for study criteria, and determine the woman's interest in participating (see Appendix A). When a telephone number was not available, or there was no answer after six to eight attempts at various times of the day and week, a letter was sent explaining the study and telling how to contact the researcher (see Appendix B). Thirty-six of the women could not be located (7 had no phone or address, 29 had addresses but did not respond to the letter--2 of those letters were returned with "moved and left no forwarding address"). One of the women agreed to

participate in the study, but she was deeply involved in a custody hearing which left her no time and little emotional energy. After talking with her by telephone for several weeks, the researcher decided that she was not able to handle the interview at that particular time, and was excluded. Nine (13%) of the women refused to be included.

Of the refusals, two initially agreed to participate but called before the interview and cancelled with explanations such as: " My new husband says let the past be; I don't think I could help you," and "I decided not to do it, I worked last night and am tired." The latter woman declined an offer to reschedule at a more convenient time. Four of the nine refusals simply said "no", or " I'd prefer not to discuss it," or "I'm not interested". Three of the refusals were made in an abrupt, angry tone of voice: "I don't want to do that!" "It's too upsetting to talk about. We're still working things out, the divorce wasn't that long ago"; " I'm not interested in anybody coming over here asking a bunch of questions".

In conclusion about the random group of 25 respondents, from the list of 71 eligible women, 35.6% did complete the research study. But of those 35 women who were actually located and asked to participate, 71% participated in the study.

The convenience group list of 29 women was compiled through contacts in the community (15 were referred by random group women, 7 were referred by colleagues of the researcher, 4 through newspaper ads, 2 by a therapist, and one by a minister). Three of those women refused when contacted by telephone and asked to participate. One was

unwilling to take the time without being paid, and the other two nicely said they did not wish to participate. This left a sample size of 26 women (90% of those contacted) in the convenience group.

### Research Instruments and Measures

The decision-making model developed by Scanzoni and Polonko (1980) reflected a conceptual approach to marital decision-making which incorporated a three-stage model: social context, processes, and outcomes.

#### Context Variables

Three sets of contextual variables were selected for examination in this study because of their relationships with divorce adjustment-- socioeconomic status, gender role preferences, and locus of control (no data were available on the association of context variables and the quality of the coparental relationship) (See Figure 1). Descriptive data were also elicited on other possibly relevant variables. All data were collected during structured interviews.

#### Socioeconomic status

Socioeconomic status refers to one's status in society and can be measured by income, education, occupation, or a combination of these. All socioeconomic data were computed so that a higher number means a higher value.

Income. Income is the money derived from capital or labor received by an individual in a given period of time. Income was measured in this study by asking respondents to look at a card and find the category of their own and their former spouse's yearly income (see Appendix C, items 67-68 and Appendix D).

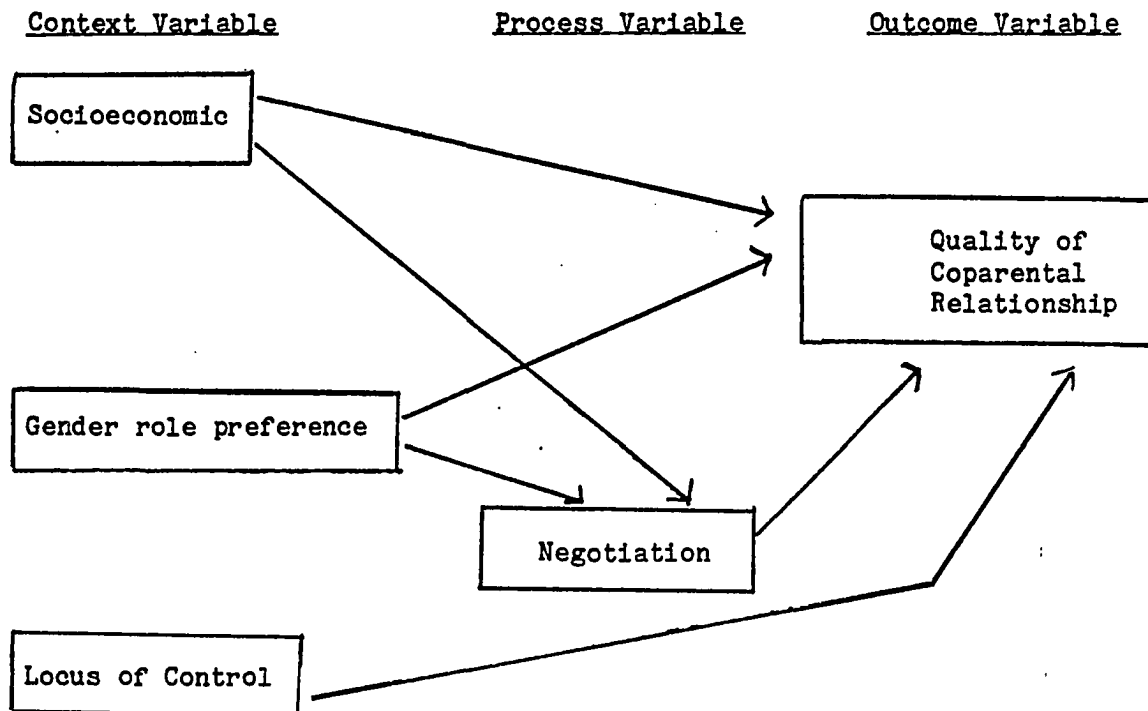


Figure 1. Model of Context, Process and Outcome Relative to Coparental Relationships

Education. The knowledge and development resulting from an educational process defines education. Respondents were asked to indicate how many years of formal school they had completed (see Appendix C, item 69), and the information was coded according to Hollingshead's education scale (see Appendix C, item 87).

Occupation. This refers to the kind of life work one does--usually for reimbursement. Respondents were asked what type of work they did and their responses were classified using Hollingshead's occupation scale (see Appendix C, item 70).

The Hollingshead two-factor index was computed for each respondent using the standard seven-point scale for both occupation and education, with occupation having a weight of seven and education a weight of four (Miller, 1977). The Hollingshead scale was chosen based on such criteria as validity, reliability, and utility (Miller, 1977). High correlation has reported between the Hollingshead and Redlich measure and the index of class position devised by Ellis, Lane, and Olisen (1963). Hollingshead and Redlich reported a correlation between judged class with education and occupation as  $R=.906$ . Hollingshead and others have made extensive studies of the reliability of scoring, and validity of the index on over one hundred variables (Miller, 1977).

#### Gender Role Preference

Gender role preference refers to a set of learned attitudes about the appropriate behavior for males and females--mothers and fathers.

Women in the Home. This subscale was the first of three factors revealed when a set of 18 questions about sex role attitudes were

analyzed (Brown & Manela, 1978). This scale was selected because it has been factor analyzed, was brief, and was thought to be applied to separated/divorced women. Respondents were given a response card and asked to respond to five statements describing roles of women and men (see Appendix C, item 72), such as, it should be the husband's duty to support his wife and family, and a woman's place should be in the home. All required the respondent to agree or disagree on a 4-point scale-- strongly disagree(1) to strongly agree(4). The responses were summed and the higher the individual's score the more traditional was the gender role preference. In the factor analysis of the original set of 18 questions, inclusion required a factor loading of .40 and a loading on the same factor at both Time I and Time II. The "Women in the home" subscale significantly differentiated between traditional and nontraditional women on self-esteem, internal control, distress and personal growth (Brown and Manela, 1978).

Coparental Gender Role Preference. Since no scale could be found which measured this variable in separated and divorced persons, a role preference scale was designed by the researcher. Respondents were given a response card and asked to select the one statement which best described what she thought, given all other things being equal, about the roles of mother and father following a divorce (see Appendix C, item 71). The statements ranged from mother custody and no relationship with the father (1), to father custody and no relationship with the mother (7). The higher the number, the less traditional was the gender role preference regarding coparental roles.

### Internal-External Locus of Control

This variable refers to an assessment of the individual's sense of personal effectiveness and control over immediate life circumstances. Levenson's (1974) scale was chosen for this study because it is a refinement of Rotter's (1966) locus of control scale. (The Rotter scale was forced-choice, 29 items, including 6 filler items. Item analysis and factor analysis showed reasonably high internal consistency for an additive scale. Test-retest reliability was satisfactory, and the scale correlated satisfactorily with other methods. The Rotter scale had discriminant and construct validity). Levenson identified three factors: P (expectancy for control by powerful others), I (perceived mastery over one's personal life) and C (chance). This researcher used only the I and P scales of Levenson's instrument, because there was no theoretical link between chance and quality of coparental relationships. Each of the scales consisted of eight items in a Likert format. These were given to the respondent as a questionnaire consisting of 16 items (see Appendix E). The scores were summed for both the I and P subscales.

Levenson (1974) conducted two studies to ascertain the validity of the separation of locus of control into the P, I, and C dimensions. The three predicted factors emerged in factor analysis. Walkey (1979) confirmed the three-factor structure underlying Levenson's questionnaire. For the I, P, and C scales, the split-half reliabilities were .72, .65, and .71 respectively, while Kuder



Richardson estimates were .60, .70, and .72. (These were similar to Levenson's results.)

#### Other Variables

Respondents were asked the number of children in the family of each sex. Families were classified as having female, male, or mixed sex children. Respondents were asked the number of children in each educational grade level, i.e., kindergarden or less, grades 1-3, grades 4-6, grades 7-9, and grades 10+. Families were classified for the total number of children (see Appendix C, item 2).

Mothers were asked their current age, the length of the separation, or number of months since the couple lived together; and the initiator of the separation--the person who originally wanted to separate. This was classified as either the husband/wife or mutual decision. The year in which the couple had married was also recorded (see Appendix C, items 3-5).

The respondents were asked whether mother, father, or both, or neither had custody or whether the issue was unresolved. This was classified as either sole custody or joint custody. Respondents were also asked the number of hours the children spent with father per month, and this was recorded in the following time blocks: less than 5, 5-20, 21-50, 51-75, 76-100, 101-125, 126-150, 151-175, 176-200, more than 200. For those with a nonmonthly arrangement, the plan was recorded in detail, the total number of hours per year were determined, and that sum was divided by 12; those respondents then were classified in the appropriate time block (see Appendix C, items 6,7).

Mothers were asked how frequently the coparents discussed parenting issues now. These were classified in the following time blocks: every day (1), several times a week (2), once a week (3), several times a month (4), once a month (5), once every couple of months (6), and rarely or never (7) (see Appendix C, item 73). The data were coded so that the larger the number, the more frequently the discussions occurred.

Finally, respondents were asked whether the mother and father were dating. Answers were recorded into three levels of involvement--not dating, dating, had a significant other relationship (engaged, cohabiting or remarried) (see Appendix C, item 86). The data were classified into three categories: mother is more involved, father is more involved, or both are involved equally. Marital status was also recorded as separated, divorced or remarried (see Appendix C, item 83). How the respondents were found for the study--through court records, professionals, advertising, or snowballing-- was recorded.

#### Process Variable

Negotiation style refers to the kind of tactics used to resolve conflicts. There are considered to be three types or levels of tactics (Scanzoni and Polonko, 1980). As long as the tactics used consist of verbal persuasion, parties are likely to maintain a spirit of conciliation, minimization of differences, and enhancement of mutual understanding and good will. This pattern is labeled "cooperative." The middle level is labeled "competitive/coercive" and the most extreme level is "violence". Successful bargaining includes

more of the cooperative tactics and less of the other two kinds (Scanzoni and Polonko, 1980).

Because there was not an instrument available to measure negotiation style, questions were developed by the investigator using theoretically valid resources (Lieberman, Wheeler, deVisser, Kuehnel, J. & Kuehnel, T., 1980; Scanzoni and Polonko, 1980; Scanzoni and Szinovacz, 1980). Examples of the 19 cooperative behaviors are: communication was open or trusting, talks were goal directed, you listened to your spouse, he listened to you, you praised his parenting ability, he praised your parenting ability, you would propose a plan for discussion, you used "I" statements in describing feelings about plans, both of you usually reached a mutually agreeable decision. Examples of the 33 competitive behaviors (which included coercive and violence) are: talks were strained, your former spouse assumed he knew what you were thinking/feeling without asking for clarification, your discussions were highly emotional, you would get sidetracked to your feelings about the relationship, he would tell you to shut up, you would tell him to shut up, you said to your spouse, "How could you do this to your children?" he would hit you after a heated discussion, you would treat him roughly in a physical manner. The 52 items were included in the interview (see Appendix C, items 15-66).

Respondents were given a response card containing the range of frequencies: none (1), some (2), a lot (3), mostly or usually (4). The respondents were told that there would be about 50 statements reflecting ways that people talked to each other. They were to answer how often that behavior occurred in their talks with their former

spouses--when discussing the children. They were specifically directed to think about the ways of relating that occurred at the time of separation in making decisions about child custody/care.

The interview guide also contained questions designed to elicit descriptive data about the bargaining process, such as who made decisions about how much time each spouse spent with the children, whether the mother was active or passive in the process, areas of disagreement about child care, and ways the mother used to influence the father on parenting issues (see Appendix C, items 8-14, 82).

#### Outcome Variable

The outcome variable in this study was the quality of the coparental relationship as measured by the two subscales of support and conflict. A high quality coparental relationship was defined as a combination of low interparental conflict and high mutual support (Ahrons, 1981).

The "quality of coparental communication " scale (Ahrons, 1981) consists of two subscales, conflict and support, and a total of ten items. Examples of the conflict items are : When you and your former spouse discuss parenting issues, how often does an argument result? How often is the conversation stressful and tense? Examples of the support items are: When you need help regarding the children, do you seek it from your former spouse? Would you say that you are a resource to your former spouse in raising the children? All required the respondent to answer each question according to a five-point scale--always (5), often (4), sometimes (3), rarely (2), and never (1).

There are coefficient alphas for the subscales developed by Ahrons: Conflict (four items) had alpha coefficients of .88 for women and .89 for men; support (six items) had alpha coefficients of .75 for men and .74 for women. In Ahrons's study, to assess the validity of respondent's self-report data, the interviewer also rated the respondents on the quality of their coparental relationships. The positive correlation was significant ( $p < .001$ ), and this was interpreted to mean that the interviewers perceived the quality of the respondents' relationship much the same as the respondents themselves did. Therefore, self-report was thought to be a valid indicator of quality.

Goldsmith (1981) also reported reliability coefficients for this scale. The coefficient of the support subscale was .82, for the conflict subscale was .85, and for the total quality of coparental relationship scale was .87.

The researcher made several alterations in Ahrons's original instrument in an attempt to clarify some of the items. The item which read, "How often is the underlying atmosphere one of hostility and anger?" was changed to "How often is the feeling tone between you one of hostility and anger?" The item which read, "Would you say that your former spouse is a resource to you in raising the children?" was changed to two items: "Would you say that your former spouse is a help to you financially in raising the children?" and "Would you say that your former spouse is a help to you emotionally in raising the children?" The item which read, "Would you say that you are a resource to your former spouse in raising the children?" was changed

to two items: "Would you say that you are a help financially to your former spouse in raising the children?" and "Would you say that you are a help emotionally to your former spouse in raising the children?"

The revised instrument consisted of four conflict items and eight support items which were included in the interview as a block of questions (see appendix C, item 74). Respondents were given a response card and asked to respond to each item according to a 5-point scale ranging from always (5) to never (1). They were asked to describe their thoughts about the current coparental relationship.

The interview guide also contained questions designed to elicit descriptive data about the quality of the coparental relationship. Questions asked about how the children were adjusting at home and at school, how much agreement and disagreement they were having about the child(ren), how satisfied the mother was about the way both of them were taking care of the children, and what her current attitude was about her marital status (see Appendix C, items 75-81).

#### Procedure

A structured interview (see Appendix C) was used to obtain all of the data except the respondent's internal-external locus of control, which was obtained by questionnaire (see Appendix E). Response cards were used for the interview questions. The interviews were all conducted by the researcher at a place convenient for the respondents. Most of the interviews were conducted in respondent's homes; however, some chose to come to the researcher's office or to meet at a local restaurant. Before the interview was begun, each respondent was asked to read and sign a research participant consent form (see Appendix F),

which also included an option for the respondent to receive, if desired, a copy of the results of the study. The interviews took from an hour to over two hours to complete. Sometimes it was necessary for the mother to stop and redirect children. At other times the phone rang, neighbors visited, etc. Many of the respondents chose to give information about the reason for the divorce or other areas pertaining to the divorce which was not elicited by the interviewer. After the interview, the respondents were asked to complete the locus of control questionnaire, which took about 15 minutes. Respondents were offered a list of books on parenting and divorce(see Appendix G) and a list of counselors (see Appendix H). Most of the respondents accepted both lists, and many added the names of additional books and people who had been helpful to them in the divorce process. Each respondent was given an opportunity to talk with the interviewer after the data collection process was complete. This counseling option was offered both as a debriefing kind of experience, and also because it had been offered in the original explanation of the study to respondents. Most women chose to spend some time further discussing their feelings, current dilemmas about the coparental relationship, current problems with dating, and to ask for support and advice.

#### Data Analysis

Data were analyzed with the statistical package, SPSSX--  
Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, revised. Factor analysis was attempted for both the process variable and the outcome variable. Pearsons correlations provided data to select the most appropriate variables for the regression equations. Path analysis was used to

ascertain the direct effects of the context variables on support and conflict, as well as the mediating effects of the intervening variable (negotiation style) (Alwin and Hauser, 1975).



## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine whether and how the quality of coparental relationships, as perceived by mothers, was influenced by selected context variables (socioeconomic status, gender role preference, and locus of control) and the negotiation process engaged in by separated spouses. Data were collected in structured interviews of separated/newly divorced female parents. Factor analysis,  $t$ -tests, chi-square, alpha coefficients, Pearson correlation, multiple regression and path analysis were used to analyze the data.

#### Description of the Sample

The respondents were mostly middle class in income, education, and occupational status, but the range was very wide. Though the mother's income was for this year, and the father's was for the last year they lived together, mothers averaged \$18,657 yearly income while fathers averaged \$24,745 (see Table 1). The range of incomes for both women and men covered the entire span of the income choices--from \$2500 to \$52,000 a year. Years of education ranged from nine to 22 with an average of 14.6 years (see Table 1). One woman had no formal high school education and six had completed graduate degrees (see Table 2). Education, however, did not always correspond with occupational status or income level. The woman with the fewest years

Table 1

Means, Ranges and Standard Deviations for Contextual Variables (N=51)

Variable	Mean	Range	SD
Socioeconomic			
Income Mother	\$18,657	\$2500-52500	9091
Father	\$24,745	\$2500-52500	15209
Education			
No. Years	14.6	9-22	2.72
Hollingshead score	2.9	1-6	1.1
Occupation	3.3	1-7	1.4
Socioeconomic Status	34.7	11-62	12.7
Gender Role Preference			
Women in the Home	11.5	7-20	2.7
Coparental Role preference	3.5	2-4	0.6
Locus of control			
Internal	45.7	17-55	5.7
External	24.6	10-44	8.5
Others			
Length of Separation	16.4	2-26	6.4
Year of Marriage	1970	1954-1980	5.4
Mother's Age	34.9	23-52	6.2
Number of Children	2.0	1-4	0.8

Table 2

Number and Percentage of Characteristics for Contextual Variables

Variable	Number	Percent
<b>Education*</b>		
Graduate degree	6	11.8
College degree	11	21.6
Partial college	21	41.2
High school grad	9	17.6
Partial high school	3	5.9
Junior high school	1	2.0
Less than 7 years	0	0.0
	51	100.0
<b>Occupation*</b>		
1 Higher executives	1	2.0
2 Lesser professionals	17	33.3
3 Administrative personnel	14	27.5
4 Clerical	13	25.5
5 Skilled manual	0	0
6 Machine operators	3	5.9
7 Unskilled	3	5.9
	51	100.0
<b>Socioeconomic Status*</b>		
I (Upper class)	1	2.0
II (Upper middle class)	21	41.1
III (Middle class)	21	41.1
IV (Upper lower class)	8	15.8
V (Lower class)	0	0.0
	51	100.0
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Separated	17	33.3
Divorced	32	62.7
Remarried	2	3.9
	51	100.0

Table 2 (con't)

## Initiated Separation

Mother	27	52.9
Father	14	27.5
Mutual decision	<u>10</u>	<u>19.6</u>
	51	100.0

## Children (Number at each grade level)

High school	18	18
Junior high	17	17
Middle school	18	18
Primary	23	23
Kindergarden or less	<u>24</u>	<u>24</u>
	100	100

## Children (Number per mother)

1 child	15	29.4
2 children	25	49.0
3 children	9	17.6
4 or more children	<u>2</u>	<u>3.9</u>
	51	100.0

## Children (Number and sex per mother)

1 male	6	11.8
1 female	9	17.6
2 males	6	11.8
2 females	6	11.8
1 of each	13	25.5
2 males, 1 female	3	5.9
2 females, 1 male	3	5.9
3+ males	1	5.9
3+ females	2	3.9
3+ mixed sexes	<u>2</u>	<u>3.9</u>
	51	100.0

## Custody

Mother	34	66.7
Father	1	2.0
Joint	15	29.4
Unresolved	<u>1</u>	<u>2.0</u>
	51	100.0

Table 2 (con't)

## Hours father spends with children per month

Less than 5	3	5.9
5-20	5	9.8
21-50	7	13.7
51-75	4	7.8
76-100	8	15.7
101-125	4	7.8
126-150	0	0
151-175	2	3.9
176-200	0	0
200+	14	27.5
Other (Not monthly)	4	7.8
	51	100.0

## Frequency of Coparental Discussions

Every day	1	2.0
Several times/week	9	17.6
Once/week	6	11.8
Several times/month	15	29.4
Once a month	7	13.7
Every couple of months	2	3.9
Rarely or never	11	21.6

## Dating Patterns

Both dating	21	41.2
Neither dating	3	5.9
Mother dating/father not	3	5.9
Father dating/mother not	3	5.9
Both have significant other	2	3.9
Mother has significant other/father dating	2	3.9
Father has significant other/mother dating	14	27.5
Mother has significant other/ father not dating	0	0
Father has significant other/mother not dating	3	5.9
	51	100.0

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\* Hollingshead's Two Factor Index used for coding. Miller (1977).

of formal education had earned her GED and was earning one of the higher incomes. The woman with 20 years of formal education had not finished her dissertation and was working at a Hollingshead level 3--administrative position. One of the women with an earned graduate degree was working as a domestic cleaning woman earning the minimal wage. These inconsistencies in education, occupational status, and income are probably reflective of divorced womens' roles and reentry into the job market.

The mean occupation score was 3.3 (administrative personnel, owners of small businesses, and minor professionals--see Table 1). Occupational status spanned the entire scale, ranging from one person who was a major professional to three women who were unskilled employees (see Table 2). The majority were in the middle levels: 33% at level 2 (lesser professionals), 27% at level 3, and 25% at level 4 (clerical). The socioeconomic scores ranged from 11 to 62 (see Table 1). The maximum range for the Hollingshead scores is 11-77, so this sample clearly represented a broad range of socioeconomic levels. The average socioeconomic score of 34.7 was within Hollingshead's level 3 or the middle social class. The upper middle class and the middle class each contained 21 women and together they comprised 82% of the sample (see Table 2).

Seventeen (33%) of the women were separated, 32 (63%) were divorced, and 2 (4%) were remarried (See Table 2). The average number of months separated was 16.4 with a minimum of two months and a maximum of 26 months (see Table 1). One of the women left this country married to one man, divorced in Mexico, and returned five days

later married to another man. The other woman who was remarried knew her new husband before separating from the previous husband.

In 27 instances (52.9%), the person who initiated the separation was the mother; in 14 instances (27.5%) it was the father, and it was a mutual decision in 10 of the couples (19.6%) (see Table 2). That women more often initiated the decision to divorce confirms the findings by Aeiss, Aeiss, and Johnson (1980).

The mothers had been married an average of 14 years, and they ranged in age from 23 to 52 with an average age of 34.9 years (see Table 1). They had a total of 100 children (see Table 2). Twenty-four of the children (24%) were kindergarden age or under, 23 (23%) were in the primary grades, and the remainder were equally divided between junior high and high school or older. Almost half (25, or 49%) of the mothers had two children (see Table 2), and the mean was 2 children per mother (see Table 1). Fifteen (29.4%) had one child and 11 (21.5%) had more than two (see Table 2). Thirteen of the mothers (25.5%) had one child of each sex. Children's sex was fairly equally divided between boys and girls.

Thirty-four mothers (66.7%) had custody or major responsibility for children (see Table 2). Joint custody was reported by 15 of the women (29.4%) and one father (2%) had custody; in fact, a young adolescent boy lived with him. Although the prevalence of joint custody was unknown at the time of this study, there appeared to be some shift from the earlier data reporting mother custody in 90% of divorces (Weitzman, 1981).

Apparently the decision about joint custody is not just a legal one. Fourteen of the mothers (27.5%) reported that their child(ren) spent more than 200 hours with their father during every month (see Table 2). Ten of the 14 had joint custody, one custody situation was unresolved, two were mother custody, and one was father custody. Only three fathers (5.9%) spent less than five hours a month with their child(ren), with one of those being a court ordered restriction as a result of physical abuse by the father. Only four fathers (7.8%) did not have a monthly arrangement for spending time with their child(ren) and all four of those lived out of state. All four had significant contact with their child(ren) through extended visits in the summer and at holidays. One of those fathers telephoned weekly to talk with both his four year old son and the boy's mother.

Forty of the mothers (78.4%) reported that they discussed coparental issues with their former spouse at least every couple of months (see Table 2). Eleven (21.6%) said that they rarely or never discussed the children with their former spouse. Goldsmith (1980) reported that 84% of former spouses with children maintained relationships; and similarly, Ahrons (1981) found that 85% of her sample continued to maintain contact. The women in this study were slightly less involved with coparental discussions than the respondents in those other two studies.

Forty-two (82.3%) of the women were currently involved in relationships with men (see Table 2). Twenty-one (41.2%) indicated that both they and their former spouse were dating. The women reported that 14 (27.5%) of the former spouses had a significant other



relationship, while they themselves were dating at a less serious level. Thus fathers were slightly more involved than the mothers in significant other relationships.

Gender role preference measures. The scores on the "women in the home" scale ranged from 7 to 20 (see Table 1). Since the maximum score range possible was 5 to 20, there was much variability in the responses. The mean score for these respondents was 11.5 (the midpoint for the scale was 12.5). The lower the score, the more non-traditional, therefore; these women were slightly more non-traditional than traditional in their gender role preferences.

The most disagreement (88.3%) on the "women in the home" scale of the gender role preference measure occurred with the item which said, a woman's place should be in the home (see Appendix I). Over half (66.6%) disagreed with the idea that women with young children should not work outside the home; however, 33.4% agreed/strongly agreed with this. Interestingly, many of those who agreed had young children and were working outside the home. This must create quite a lot of conflict since their behavior is so different from their values. The frequency responses of the other three items on the "women in the home" measure of the gender role preference variable split almost down the middle between disagree and agree (see Appendix I).

Many indicated that they had changed their ideas about this since becoming divorced. Several of the women with nontraditional scores were concerned about the absence of statements about men. They indicated that they thought the needs of family and children sometimes should come before the needs of mother and father, but not just those

of the mother. This raises questions about the validity of the instrument since those respondents had great difficulty fitting their answers into the items as stated. Their concern about weighing each situation and making decisions based on the needs of all the family members is consistent with Scanlon's (1983) theoretical notion that new family rules should emphasize negotiation.

On the scale to measure coparental role preference after divorce the mean was 3.5, with a range of 2-4 (see Table 1). The only three roles chosen were mother to have custody/father visitation, mother to have custody/father visitation and active participant in decisions, and joint custody. The mean indicated that the women as a whole were somewhere between the latter two statements in their attitudes about roles after divorce.

Locus of control measures. On both of the subscales to measure locus of control (internal and external), the range was 8-56; the higher the score, the more internally or externally focused was the woman. The mean for the internal locus of control was 45.7 with a range of 17-55 (see Table 1). The mean for the external locus of control was 24.6 with a range of 10-44. The women tended to be more internal than external in their locus of control, and their responses reflected much variability--especially on the internal scale.

### Exploratory Data Analysis

The first purpose of this study was to increase the substantive knowledge of the quality of parental relationships among separated or divorced parents and the degree of support and conflict inherent in

those relationships, as well as of the processes of negotiation which occur in the relationships. This research found that many of the newly separated or divorced women were working out their own child care arrangements in very individualized ways. With few exceptions, the decisions reflected a process of negotiation instead of relying on old static notions that said the children should live with mother and father could see them every other weekend.

Several couples were splitting the care equally with the children living a week here and a week there, or two weeks here and two weeks there, or alternating weeks beginning in the middle of the week so that parents could have a full child-free weekend. One couple maintained the family home and the parents moved in and out at two-week intervals--both having their own separate apartments. One woman reported that her former husband was sharing a home with another male single parent, and the two men had negotiated with their former spouses so that they had two weeks with their five children and two weeks with no children. Some parents, with input from the children, decided that only one of the children would visit the father at the time. One mother and father changed the custody from mother to father following much reflection and discussion. The mother was concerned about what other people would think but knew the change was best for their particular "family".

Even for those women who had more traditional arrangements, in which the children spent every other weekend with their father, often there was great flexibility in which weekend and how much time. One father traveled a great deal so their plans changed depending on when

he was at home. When asked about their child care arrangements, many mothers began by saying, "We have an unusual arrangement," or "You're not going to believe this but," or "Do you mean what our legal agreement is or what we actually do?" These statements and the examples given above reflected the level of flexibility and continuing negotiation that was occurring between the parents. The level of negotiation and consensus in many of these couples reinforce the idea that when people participate in decisions, there is a greater likelihood of order. They perceive that the potential rewards are great enough to take the trouble and expend the energies necessary to negotiate. Several expressed directly a commitment to the coparental relationship which involved trust and a valuing of the father's continued involvement with the children.

Many of the women expressed concerns about father's parenting ability. The mothers were concerned about events such as, a father took his preschool children on a boat ride and did not provide life jackets, a father did not insist on the children brushing their teeth, a father did not provide well-balanced meals, and father did not supervise children closely enough. Many fathers were described as wanting to just play or entertain the children without taking on full parental responsibility. Perhaps fathers do need some education about those aspects of child care that mothers have traditionally learned and taken responsibility for. If so, what are those areas?

In response to questions about general areas of disagreement, concerns were expressed about how to handle dating with the children. Mothers were especially concerned about father coming to pick up the

children with his girlfriend along, or father sleeping with another woman while the children were spending the night with him. Most of the women spoke about using much caution in introducing their dates to their children, and few admitted that their children knew about any of their sexual relationships with boyfriends.

One mother reported that her teenage daughter, after almost a year of involvement with her father's girlfriend, asked the girlfriend why she wasn't living with her father, and indicated that that would be ok with her. Another parent did not have men come to the house until after the children were in bed. She did not want the children to develop a relationship, and then face losing another male father figure when the mother decided to end the relationship. She waited until she was "serious" and then gradually included the children.

How do the children feel about their parents dating? According to literature, most children hope their parents will get back together, so new partners could be stressful for the children. Irving (1984) reported, however, that new partners had a positive effect on children (76%) and were perceived by children (as reported by respondent) as either caring friends (74%) or as parent's friends. The effect of the new relationship on shared parenting was either positive (50%) or had no effect.

#### Process Variable

Responses to the instrument on negotiation style indicated how the coparents were handling disagreements and making decisions about the children. The instrument had two subscales--cooperation and competition. The cooperative items chosen most frequently reflected

goal-directed talks, listening to each other, proposing a plan, using "I" statements in describing feelings, the mother showing consideration for the father's feelings, and both of them usually reaching mutually agreeable decisions (see Table 3).

Competitive items chosen most frequently were related to emotional rather than cognitive processes. For example, "my former spouse assumed what I was thinking without clarifying", talks were strained, discussions were highly emotional, and the spouses got sidetracked to feelings about the relationship when trying to discuss plans for the children.

All of the least frequently chosen items were on the competitive subscale (see Table 3). Five of the eight items were related to physical violence. The other three referred to mothers' behavior such as pouting, telling former spouse to shut up, and refusing to discuss issues. These data reflect the general absence of violence during the parent's discussions.

Other data reflective of the negotiation style were elicited through questions on decision-making and on areas of particular disagreement. When asked who made the decisions about the custody and visitation arrangements, 17 of these women (33.3%) indicated that both parents did, without any outside help (see Table 4). Twelve of the mothers (23.5%) and 7 of the fathers (13.7%) made the decision alone. Ten (less than 20%) used either therapists or lawyers to help them make decisions about the children. Only three (5.9%) of the women reported that they relied on the courts to make the decision. The amount of adversarial decision-making among this group appears to

Table 3

Most and Least Frequently Chosen Items From the Process Variable Instrument

Item	Mean	SD
<u>Most Frequently Chosen Items</u>		
Cooperative Subscale		
16. Talks were goal directed	2.6	1.1
17. You listened to your spouse	3.2	0.9
23. He listened to you	2.5	1.0
35. You would propose a plan	2.9	1.0
40. You used "I" statements in describing feelings	2.5	1.0
54. You tried to show consideration for his feelings	2.5	1.0
56. Both of you usually reached a mutually agreeable decision	2.5	1.2
Competitive Subscale		
18. Talks were strained	3.2	1.0
19. Your former spouse assumed he knew what you were thinking	2.9	1.1
21. Your discussions were highly emotional	2.9	1.0
51. You would get sidetracked to your feelings about your relationship	2.5	1.0
<u>Least Frequently Chosen Items</u>		
Competitive Subscale		
22. You would throw things at him	1.1	0.3
28. You pouted	1.5	0.8
37. He would throw things at you	1.2	0.6
48. You refused to discuss issues	1.3	0.5
49. You would tell your former spouse to shut up	1.5	0.8
63. He would hit you	1.2	0.7
64. He would treat you roughly in a physical manner	1.3	0.6
66. You would treat him roughly	1.1	0.3

Table 4

Who Made Decisions About Custody/Visitation

Category	Number	Percent
Father	7	13.7
Mother	12	23.5
Courts	3	5.9
Both with Lawyer	5	9.8
Both with Therapist	5	9.8
Both with no Outside Help	17	33.3
No decision	2	3.9
	<u>51</u>	<u>100.0</u>



have been low, and this finding could be very encouraging if indeed the coparental relationship is strengthened when an adversarial approach is not used (Anderson, 1981; Derdeyn, 19785; Duncan, 1979; Ilfeld, 1982; Irving, 1980; Suarez, 1978; & Young, 1980). When making initial decisions about the children, a large majority (88.2%) indicated that they were active rather than passive in the negotiation process.

Each women was asked about an area of childcare around which she and her former spouse disagreed. Fourteen (27.5%) mentioned "time with parents" (see Table 5). The majority of their responses were about how the mother was concerned about what she perceived was happening during father's visiting time. The fathers reportedly would pick up the children and then take them to his mother's house, include his girlfriend in the visit, or ignore the child by watching television. Other examples included fathers promising to visit and then cancelling. One of the children would call her remarried father and ask for more time for a special occasion only to be refused. Only one mother mentioned having a disagreement about the actual arrangement of visitation time. Two of the mothers felt the father wanted too much time with the children; both instances involved primary grade or younger children whom the father wanted for overnights in his home. One mother perceived the father as wanting equal rights in decision-making but refusing to have the children stay with him for even one overnight. Another mother could only ensure time for the children with their father by providing all the transportation and complying with spur of the moment requests.

**Table 5****Areas of Child Care Disagreement**

Area	Number	Percent
Time with Parents	14	27.5
Discipline	11	21.6
Money	9	17.6
Holidays	4	7.8
Other	13	25.5
	<u>51</u>	<u>100.0</u>

Eleven (21.6%) women mentioned discipline as a major area of disagreement. Five of the women perceived that they were more strict than the father. Several were concerned about two sets of house rules and that effect on the children; and three of the mothers wanted help from their former spouses in controlling teenagers or problem solving about younger children but felt the fathers were not being supportive. One mother was concerned about father's spanking whereas she thought "time-out" and positive reinforcement were best. Another mother reported that the father wanted her to spank and discipline more. One father reportedly would explode and overdo punishment--then have to take back part of it.

Nine women (17.6%) found money to be an area of disagreement. Five of the disagreements were about mother wanting more child support money than father was willing to pay. One mother was not getting any money and another was receiving payments irregularly. One child had an unusual health problem and father had refused to help pay for treatment. One mother wanted the unwilling father to pay for a car and for health insurance for children. One mother was concerned about the large amount of money that the father gave his son without the son having to do any work for it.

Other areas of child-care disagreements included whether to send child to public or private school, use of the car, what kind of health care was appropriate (reported by four women), church attendance, who would have custody, father too protective, father quizzing children

about mother's activities, and father not supervising children closely enough.

The women were asked about how they tried to influence their former husbands in decisions about the children. Over half (54.9%) reported that they said, "It's best for the children" (see Table 6). Six (11.8%) reported using all of the options (it's best for the children, for me, for you, for everybody), and 7 (13.7%) denied using any of those strategies.

When asked how often they tried to influence their former spouses by bargaining such as, "If you do this, then I'll do that", almost half the women (47.1%) denied ever doing this. Eleven (21.6%) said "seldom" and the same number reported "sometimes". This has been described as one of the most effective strategies to resolve marital conflicts (Liberman et al., 1980), and as a mediation strategy (Irving, 1980). The low number of such responses is particularly interesting in the light of factor analysis (see page 84) which paired the items, "If he gives financial support, I'll cooperate with changes in visitation". Either the women did not recognize this as a bargaining strategy or they were not consciously aware of using it. Only five (9.8%) women reported frequent use of this kind of bargaining.

#### Outcome Variable: Quality of Coparental Relationship

Conflict. Of the four conflict items on Ahrons's (1981) revised instrument to measure quality of the coparental relationship, arguments resulting from parenting discussions occurred least

Table 6

Strategies Used to Influence Former Spouse in Decisions  
About Children

Strategy	Number	Percent
1. It's best for the children	28	54.9
2. It's best for me	0	0
3. It's best for you	0	0
4. It's best for everybody	1	2.0
None of the above	7	13.7
All of the above	6	11.8
Numbers 1,2	3	5.9
All but 2	1	2.0
Numbers 1,3	2	3.9
Numbers 1,4	3	5.9
	51	100.0%

frequently (mean=2.4), while stressful or tense conversations were the most frequently occurring (mean=3.0)(see Table 7).

The respondents were asked how frequently each of the four conflict items occurred (never, rarely, sometimes, often or always). Those "rarely" or " never" experiencing conflict ranged from 41.1% on the item asking about stressful conversations to 58.8% on the item asking about arguments (see Table 7). The most frequent response on all of the conflict items was that they "rarely" experienced conflict. Those who reported experiencing conflict either "often" or" always" ranged from a low of 23.5% on arguments resulting from parenting discussions to a high of 31.3% on having stressful or tense conversations (see Table 7). Approximately half of the women perceived their relationship to be conflictual at least some of the time. This is consistent with Ahrons's (1981) findings. Only about one-fourth of the women reported conflict occurring as frequently as "often" or "always" in the coparental relationship. This is slightly less than the frequency reported for women by Ahrons (34%).

Support. Approximately two-thirds of the women (63.5%) perceived their relationship as supportive at least some of the time, and the majority (47%) reported supportive coparenting interactions as frequently as" often" or "always" (see Table 8). These percentages are almost identical to those reported by Ahrons (1981); in that study 62% saw the relationship as supportive at least some of the time and 44.9% indicated that it was supportive often or always.

Among the eight support items on Ahrons' revised instrument to measure quality of the coparental relationship, the women perceived

Table 7

Percentage of Conflict Items Chosen by Frequency From the Quality of  
Coparental Relationship Scale (N=51)

Conflict Items	Mean	SD	Frequency				
			Never	Rare	Some- times	Often	Always
When discussing parenting, argu- ment results	2.4	1.1	19.6 (58.8)	39.2	23.5	13.7 (17.6)	3.9
Feeling tone is hostile/angry	2.7	1.1	9.8 (47.1)	37.3	29.4	17.6 (23.5)	5.9
Conversation stressful/tense	3.0	1.2	7.8 (41.1)	33.3	27.5	17.6 (31.3)	13.7
Differences of opinion: child rearing	2.8	1.2	13.7 (45.1)	31.4	27.5	17.6 (27.4)	9.8

Table 8

Percentage of Support Items Chosen by Frequency From the Quality of Coparental Relationship Scale (N=51)

Support Items	Mean	SD	Frequency				
			Never	Rare	Some- times	Often	Always
Seeks help from former spouse	2.5	1.2	25.5 (54.9)	29.4	21.6	19.6 (23.5)	3.9
Former spouse helps financially	3.4	1.6	25.5 (31.4)	5.9	13.7	17.6 (54.9)	37.3
Former spouse helps emotionally	2.3	1.2	31.4 (62.8)	31.4	17.6	15.7 (19.6)	3.9
You help him financially	3.5	1.6	23.5 (23.5)	0	15.7	23.5 (60.8)	37.3
You help him emotionally	3.3	1.2	11.8 (25.5)	13.7	25.5	33.3 (49.0)	15.7
You cooperate with changes	4.5	1.0	5.9 (5.9)	0	3.9	21.6 (90.2)	68.6
He cooperates with changes	3.5	1.5	15.7 (29.4)	13.7	7.8	25.5 (62.8)	37.3
He understands/is supportive of you as a parent	2.6	1.3	25.5 (47.1)	21.6	27.5	15.7 (25.5)	9.8



emotional support from former spouses in raising the children as occurring least frequently (mean=2.3), yet their willingness to be cooperative with their former spouses by making changes in visiting arrangements was reported most frequently (mean=4.5) (see Table 8). Approximately half (54.9%) of the women reported that they "rarely" or "never" sought help from their former spouses if they needed help regarding the children.

The coparental relationship was seen as supportive "often" or "always" in several areas: 90.2% of the women reported that they cooperated with the father's requests for changes in visiting arrangements, and 62.8% reported that fathers cooperated with their requests for changes in visiting arrangements (Ahrons [1981] found that 96% of both men and women reported their own cooperativeness, but only 73% of the women thought their former spouses would accommodate). In addition, 60.8% reported that they helped their former spouses financially in raising the children, 54.9% indicated that the children's father helped them financially in raising the children, 49% reported that they were helpful emotionally to their former spouses in raising the children.

In keeping with the fact that these women saw themselves as more supportive to their former spouses in the childrearing role than vice versa, 47.1% of them reported that "rarely" or "never" did they feel that their former spouses understood or were supportive of their special needs as a parent. Less than a fourth, however, reported that conflict occurred "often" or "always," and supportive behavior was reported to occur "often" or "always" by approximately two-thirds.

Overall Quality of the Coparental Relationship. Other data reflective of the quality of the coparental relationship included the women's satisfaction with how both parents were taking care of the children, perceptions of children's adjustment, agreements and disagreements about child care, plans for custody relitigation, and current attitude about marital status. Fifty-five percent indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with how both parents were taking care of the children. Feelings of dissatisfaction or resentment were expressed by 25.4% of the women, and 19.6% were resigned or neutral.

Children's adjustment was perceived to be slightly higher at home (75% doing very well) than at school (61% doing very well). Children not doing well or pretty upset at home were reported by 2 (4%) of the mothers; 7 (14%) reported their children were not doing well at school. The poor adjustment at school was reflected in both lowered grades or failing grades and behavior problems. Nine mothers volunteered that their children's grades had dropped around the time of either separation or divorce finalization. One mother had placed her child in private school to try and deal with school grades. One of the mothers reported that her daughter's grades improved after things settled down after the divorce.

One mother of a young adolescent revealed, "We had serious talks about his grades. I acknowledged the tough times but said, 'It's time to adjust and get down to business with your school work. Worrying about your relationship with your dad is not helping. I'm here for

you if you want to talk and if I can't help you, we'll find somebody who can.' That cleared the air and his grades improved."

Four of the mothers volunteered that their children manifested behavior problems. One was suspended from school; many had been in counseling. One of the young adolescent boys had gotten into trouble with the law since the divorce. Two mothers reported an increase in physical symptoms. Both girls in one family had very serious "accidents" following the separation. The mothers seemed more able to admit to adjustment problems at school than to problems in the more personal area of home life. Or maybe that is how the children's concerns were reflected.

One of the most obvious examples of discrepancies between what the women said was going on and what the interviewer inferred to be occurring was in the area of children's adjustment problems. As reported above, when asked specifically about the children's adjustment at home and school, they often responded "ok" or "very well". Perhaps their need to make sure that children were not adversely affected influenced their "socially desirable" answers. This discrepancy did raise questions about the validity of those answers.

Almost half (45.1%) of the women indicated having almost total agreement with former spouses about child care (Table 9). Another 17 (33.3%) reported some agreement and some conflict. Somewhat less than a fourth (21.5%) indicated either a lot of conflict or so much conflict that they couldn't talk.

Table 9

Amount of Coparental Agreement/Conflict About Child Care

Category	Number	Percent
Can't talk	7	13.7
Lot of conflict	4	7.8
Some agreement/some conflict	17	33.3
Almost total agreement	23	45.1
	51	100.0

When asked how many times they had been unable to resolve disagreements in the past month, 31 (60.8%) indicated "never." An additional 17 (33.3%) said one to two times. For those who were talking, 94% were able to resolve disagreements.

Planning for relitigation about child custody has been used in other studies (Ahrons, 1981; Cline and Westman, 1971; Ilfeld, 1982) as an indicator of the quality of the coparental relationship. Percentages ranged from a low of 16% (joint custody) to a high of 52% (Cline & Westman, 1971). In the present study, 43 (84.3%) were not planning to return to court. Five (9.8%) were undecided, and only three (5.9%) planned to proceed with relitigation. Perhaps the low percentage of dissatisfaction in this study is related to the high percentage (29.4%) of women with joint custody, and the high percentage (27.5%) of fathers who spent more than 200 hours a month with their children. Even though conflict, disagreement and dissatisfaction were evident, the adversarial route of decision-making had been chosen by only 5.9% of the sample.

Another measure of relationship satisfaction used in this study was how the women felt about their marital status at the present. Forty-three (84.3%) indicated they were comfortable with the separation or divorce; five (9.8%) were resigned; and three (5.9%) were resentful or depressed about the separation or divorce. Subjective impressions of the researcher coincided with the women's expressed feelings.

In summary, conflict was reported as occurring "often" or "always" by less than one-fourth of the women, supportive behavior was reported to occur "often" or "always" by a much greater percentage--approximately two-thirds. Over half reported being satisfied with how both of the parents were taking care of the children. Almost half indicated having almost total agreement with their former spouse about child care, and well over half reported that they never were unable to resolve disagreements. Three-fourths of the children were adjusting very well at home, and well over half were adjusting very well at school. As a final indicator of more support than conflict in the coparental relationship, only three women were planning to return to court for changes in child custody arrangements.

#### Comparison of Random and Convenience Groups

Even though the respondents were chosen by both random and convenience methods, the descriptive and exploratory data have been presented here for the total group because of the small size of the sample and because the differences between the groups were not sufficient to necessitate separate analysis. Twenty-six variables were examined for differences between the two groups of subjects. They did not differ significantly on the following 20 variables: who initiated separation, who had custody, attitude about marital status, years married, time spouse spent with the children, mother's age, education, income, occupational level, socioeconomic status, gender role preference, internal and external locus of control, satisfaction with child's care, child's adjustment at home and school, amount of

agreement about child care, number of disagreements unresolved, and the conflict variable of the coparental relationship.

The groups differed significantly on only six variables: marital status ( $\chi^2=24.99$ ) and method of referral ( $\chi^2=51$ ) (see Table 10); months separated ( $t=-4.91$ ), father's income ( $t=2.24$ ), frequency of coparental discussions ( $t=-2.80$ ), and the coparental relationship support variable ( $t=2.07$ ) (see Table 11). In the convenience group, 17 women were separated and eight were divorced (see Table 10). In the random group, 24 were divorced. One in each group was remarried. In regard to method of referral, all 25 in the random group came from court records (see Table 10). In the convenience group, 13 were referred by other professionals or advertising and 13 names were generated by asking subjects for other women meeting study criteria. Both of these differences (marital status and method of referral) were expected and were not a problem in analyzing the data for the group as a whole.

The convenience group had been separated an average of 12.88 months and the random group had been separated an average of 20.12 months (see Table 11). This difference was expected because the convenience group contained a larger number of separated than divorced women, and six of these had been separated six months or less. An interesting difference was that even though mother's income was no different in the two groups, father's mean income of \$29,231 was significantly higher in the convenience group than in the random group (see Table 11).

Table 10

Descriptions of Group Differences as Measured by Chi-Square

Characteristic	Group		Chi-Square
	<u>Convenience</u> No. (%)	<u>Random</u> No. (%)	
<hr/>			
<u>Marital Status</u>			
Separated	17 (65%)	0	24.99***
Divorced	8 (31%)	24 (96%)	
Remarried	1 ( 4%)	1 ( 4%)	
<u>Referral Method</u>			
Court Records	0	25 (100%)	51.0***
Colleagues	13 (50%)	0	
Snowballing	13 (50%)	0	



Table 11

Descriptions of Group Differences as Measured by t tests

Characteristic	Convenience		Group Random		t test
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Number months Since Separation	12.88	6.5	20.12	3.7	-4.91***
Father's Income	29,231	16,089	20,080	12,954	2.24*
Frequency of Coparental Discussions	3.69	1.8	5.0	1.53	-2.8**
Support Outcome Variable	12.1	4.5	9.7	3.8	2.07*

Another variable found to be significantly different was the frequency of coparental discussions. The mean for the convenience group was 3.69 on a scale of 1-7 (category 4 was, discussed parenting issues several times a month) whereas the random group mean was 5.0 (discussed parenting issues with former spouse only once a month) (see Table 11). This could be a function of the need of the newly separated women in the convenience group to discuss arrangements more often simply because they were newly separated. Or perhaps the fathers with the higher incomes were more apt to initiate discussions about children. There was no significant difference between the random and convenience groups on the conflict variable of the quality of coparental relationship scale. There was a significant difference in the support variable (see Table 11). The mean for the convenience group (12.1) was higher, indicating that those women perceived themselves to be more supported by their former spouses than the randomly chosen group. The differences could be due to a number of women in the convenience group who were from the unusually liberal Orange County. Some of these women were not typical of divorced women, but their inclusion added a special dimension to the study. Several of them had worked out quite creative child-care arrangements--usually involving joint custody. In an exploratory study such as this, the wide variety of women added data especially about highly supportive coparental relationships which might not have been discovered in a random sampling process. Since there were these differences between the two groups, "group" was included in a

regression equation on the dependent variables, but it did not enter as a predictor. Given these findings, and the small sample size, and the somewhat exploratory nature of this study, the data were analyzed using the 51 subjects collectively as one group.

### Methodological Analyses

A second purpose of this study was to investigate the validity, reliability, and unidimensionality of scales measuring the quality of coparental relationships (particularly assessing the existence of two subscales, support and conflict), and the negotiation process (particularly examining the subprocesses of cooperation and competition).

#### Outcome Variable: Quality of Coparental Relationships

Ahrons' (1981) scale was used to measure quantitatively the quality of the coparental relationship. Because Ahrons omitted a discussion of validity, a first step was to subject her items to factor analysis. The 12 revised items were analyzed using the SPSSX principal component analysis (Nie, 1983). The extraction method was orthogonal and only the factors having eigenvalues greater than one were considered significant. Four factors were rotated to a final solution using the varimax criterion (see Figure 2). The four factors retained 70% of the variability. Factor I (eigenvalue of 4.77 explaining 40% of variance) was clearly the "supportive spouse." Factor II (eigenvalue of 1.34 explaining 11.1% of variance) contained three of the four items which Ahrons reported to measure conflict and was named "conflict". Factor III (eigenvalue of

	Factors			
	I Supportive Spouse	II Conflict	III Quid pro quo	IV Support to spouse
Former spouse understands and is supportive of your special needs as a parent. (12)	.83			
Former spouse is a help to you emotionally in raising the children. (7)	.83			
When needs help regarding the children, seeks it from former spouse (5)	.73			
Former spouse tries to cooperate with changes in visiting arrangements that you need to make. (11)	.66			
You and former spouse have basic differences of opinion related to child rearing. (4)	-.41	(.38)		
Feeling tone is often one of hostility and anger. (2)		.87		
When you and former spouse discuss parenting issues, an argument results. (1)		.86		
Conversation is stressful and tense. (3)		.84		
Former spouse is help to you financially in raising the children. (6)			.79	
If former spouse needed to make changes in visiting arrangements, you tried to cooperate. (10)			.76	
You are a help emotionally to your former spouse in raising the children. (9)				.75
You are a help financially to your former spouse in raising the children. (8)				.72

Figure 2. Quality of coparental relationship: Factor structure and factor loadings. (Item numbers are in parentheses.)

1.26 explaining 10.5% of variance) contained an interesting pair of items and was named "quid pro quo", meaning "something for something" (i.e., if he supports her financially then she cooperates with changes in visiting arrangements). Factor IV (eigenvalue of 1.03 explaining 8.6% of variance) contained the "supportive to spouse" items.

Item 4, which described basic differences of opinion between spouses about child rearing, loaded almost equally on two factors--I and II. Also, it was the only item which loaded less than .50. Hair (1979) indicated that a .50 loading was considered to be very significant. That particular "split" item appeared to be problematic because it was interpreted two ways by respondents.

Alpha reliability coefficients were computed for all four factors (Factor I was computed both with and without item 4), a combined Factor I and Factor II scale, and for Ahrons's revised support and conflict subscales (see Figure 3). The final decision was to use Factor I without item 4 ( $\alpha = .84$ ) as the support dependent variable, and Factor II ( $\alpha = .89$ ) for the conflict dependent variable. Those reliability coefficients were higher than the Ahrons's subscales. The alpha coefficients for Factors III and IV were too low to be considered. The reliability coefficient for the combined quality of coparental relationship score using Factors I and II was .87. Because the combined score reliability was lower than that for one of the subscale scores, and because subsequent analysis (see below) revealed different variables to be correlated with each of the subscales, the investigator decided to use the two variables and not to combine them for the regression and path analyses. (Because

<u>Scale</u>	<u>Alpha Coefficient</u>
Factor I (items 4,5,7,11,12)	.61
Factor II (items 1-3)	.89
Factor III (items 6,10)	.51
Factor IV (items 8,9)	.32
Factor I (items 5,7,11,12)	.84
Combined Factor I and Factor II (items 5,7,11,12 and items 1-3 scores reversed)	.87
Ahrons's Subscales	
Conflict (items 1-4)	.82
Support (items 5-12)	.73

Figure 3. Alpha reliability coefficients for various ways of scoring the dependent variable.

only 2 of the original 4 factors were used, a smaller percentage of the variance [51%] was retained.)

Each respondent was given a conflict score by adding the sum of the frequency response for items 1-3, and each respondent received a support score by adding the sum of the frequency response for items 5,7,11,12. When the scores for the support variable were summed, the mean was 10.9. Out of a maximum range of 4-20, the women's scores ranged from 4-19, reflecting wide variation in the amount of support perceived by the women in the coparenting relationship. The conflict mean score was 8.1. Out of a maximum range of 3-15, the women's scores ranged from 3-14, also reflecting wide variation in the amount of conflict perceived by the women.

Process Variable: Negotiation Style

Because no scale was available to quantitatively measure the style of interaction between coparents, the researcher developed one with items taken from theoretically valid sources (Irving, 1980; Liberman et al., 1980; Scanzoni and Polonko, 1980; Scanzoni and Szinovacz, 1980). This process variable was pretested with three respondents and subjected to factor analysis. The 52 items were analyzed using the SPSSX principal component analysis (Nie, 1983). The extraction method was orthogonal and only the factors having eigenvalues greater than one were considered significant. The results indicated 15 factors which represented 80% of the variability (see Appendix J).

The factor analysis revealed what is probably obvious--that communication styles are very complex and the items in the tool

reflected many different aspects of both cooperative and competitive interactions. Some of the patterns of mother/father interaction were indeed interesting but the small sample size and other problems with the factor analysis made the results unreliable. The item loadings indicated much overlap in meaning. Twenty-five of the items loaded (.30 and above) on 2 factors, 17 loaded on 3 factors, and 3 loaded on 4 factors; 101 of the 138 loadings were less than .50. Fifteen factors were far too many to use with 51 subjects. (When an attempt was made to force the factor analysis to select two factors, only 30% of the variability was retained and the factors were not conceptually valid.)

Alpha coefficients were computed for the first four factors from the factor analysis, the two researcher developed subscales of cooperation and competition, and for the entire 52 items on the negotiation scale. The alpha coefficients for the four factors were all low (.43, .67, .56, and .09, respectively) (see Figure 4). The coefficients for the cooperative and competitive subscales were quite high (.80 and .88, respectively), but the reliability coefficient of .90 for the combined negotiation score (as derived from the 52 items) was even higher. Because the highest reliability coefficient was for the total 52 items, that was used as the process variable in further analyses.

Each subject received a cooperative score which was a sum of the frequency responses for the following items: 15-17, 23-24, 30, 33-35, 39-40, 42-45, 47, 54, 56-57. Each subject received a competitive score which was a sum of the frequency responses for the following



<u>Scale</u>	<u>Alpha Coefficient</u>
Factor 1 (Items 15,16,21,23, 59,29,65,20,46,56-58,45,25, 26,62,49,36,52)	.43
Factor 2 (Items 63,37,64,42,32)	.67
Factor 3 (Items 34,43,30,66)	.56
Factor 4 (Items 64,47,60,31)	.09
Cooperative Subscale	.80
Competitive Subscale	.88
Negotiation Scale (all items from both cooperative and competitive subscales)	.90

Figure 4. Alpha reliability coefficients for various ways of considering the process variable.

items: 18-22, 25-29, 32-33, 36-38, 41, 46, 48-53, 55, 58-66. A combined negotiation score was then computed by reversing the scores on the competitive items and adding the sums of the two subscales. The higher the negotiation score, the more cooperative and less competitive was the style of relating. The mean for the negotiation variable was 145.5. With a maximum range of scores of 52-208, the respondents scores ranged between 108-186, reflecting wide variation.

#### Statistical Analyses Among Variables

A third purpose of this study was to develop and test a conceptual model, based on Scanzoni and Polonko (1980), which examines relationships among context variables, process of negotiation, and the quality of the coparental relationship of separated or divorced parents. Variables were chosen to be included in the model testing phase of this study based on significant bivariate correlations with the outcome variables. Correlations were computed between contextual variables and the process variable, contextual variables and conflict, contextual variables and support, and the process variable and outcome variables. Multivariant statistical analysis and path analysis were then used to test the hypotheses.

#### Correlation Matrix

Relation of Contextual and Process Variables. Seven of the contextual variables were significantly related to the process variable: time children spent with father ( $r=.41$ ), attitudes about the coparental role after divorce ( $r=.40$ ), custody ( $r=.38$ ), mother's income ( $r=.33$ ), father's income ( $r=.31$ ), initiator of separation ( $r=.31$ ), and external locus of control ( $r=-.27$ ) (see Table 12). As

Table 12

Correlation Matrix Between Contextual Variables, Process  
Variable and Dependent Variables

Contextual Variables	Process Variable	<u>Dependent Variables</u>	
		Support	Conflict
Socioeconomic			
Income Mother	.33**	.27*	-.09
Father	.31*	.12	-.04
Education			
No. Years	.18	.39**	-.10
Hollingshead Score	.22	.47***	-.11
Occupation	.15	.25*	-.03
Socioeconomic Status	.20	.37**	-.06
Gender Role Preference			
Women in the Home scale	-.23	-.16	.14
Coparental role after divorce	.40**	.47***	-.03
Locus of control			
Internal	.10	.14	-.14
External	-.27*	-.06	.06
Others			
Months Separated	-.10	-.02	-.21
Year of Marriage	-.18	.09	.05
Mother's age	.22	-.07	-.05
Number of Children	.08	-.29*	.25*
Children's Age	-.03	-.09	.13
Children's Sex	-.06	.09	.00
Initiator of Separation	.31*	.23	-.14
Custody	.38**	.26*	.00
Time Children With Father	.41***	.39**	-.14
Frequency of Discussions	.18	.52***	-.23*

\*p<.05. \*\*p<.01. \*\*\*p<.001.

the children spent more time with the father, negotiations became more successful (more cooperative and less competitive). When the attitude about coparental role moved away from the desire for sole mother custody towards joint custody, and when joint custody occurred instead of sole custody, the negotiations were more successful. As the income of mother and father increased, negotiations became more successful. When the decision to separate was mutual, instead of the decision of either one or the other, the negotiations were more successful. When the mother perceived minimal external control over her life, the negotiations were more successful. Negotiations were not significantly related to mother's age, education, occupation, or socioeconomic status, internal locus of control, frequency of discussions, months separated, or any of the child variables (number, sex, and age).

Relation of Contextual Variables and Support. The relationships between the contextual variables and the dependent variable support were examined by looking first at the variables originally chosen for study--socioeconomic variables, gender role preference, and locus of control (see Table 12). All of the socioeconomic variables, except father's income, were significantly related to support in the coparental relationship. Educational attainment, as measured by the Hollingshead score, showed the strongest correlation with support ( $r=.47$ ) (see Table 12), so it was used in subsequent analyses to represent socioeconomic status. The more education the woman had, the higher was the perceived support.

The gender role preference score, as measured by the "women in the home" scale, did not correlate with the dependent variable, but the alternative measure--coparental role preference after divorce--correlated moderately with the support subscale ( $r=.47$ )(see Table 12). The more the woman believed that parental roles after divorce should be shared, rather than mother having sole custody, the more supportive the coparental relationship was.

Neither of the locus of control measures was significantly correlated with the support variable. Although attributes such as self-assurance, self-sufficiency, and ego strength have been found to be correlated with divorce adjustment in women (Thomas, 1982), perhaps they are not necessarily related to adjustment in the coparental relationship because the latter depends on two people. Having a strong sense of internal control over one's life may not be that helpful in establishing a satisfying coparental relationship. It is also possible that another measure of those psychological attributes, rather than the locus of control measurement instrument, would have yielded more significant results.

In summary, of the socioeconomic variables, mother's educational level had the strongest correlation with support. There was no relationship between locus of control and the support variable. Only one of the gender role preference variables, coparental role preference after divorce, was related to support. Those who preferred the more nontraditional joint sharing of the children rather than the more traditional mother sole custody arrangement did experience a more supportive coparental relationship.

Four of the other contextual variables were significantly correlated with support (see Table 12). The greater the frequency of coparental discussions about matters related to the children, the more support the mother perceived she was getting from the father ( $r=.52$ ).

The more time father spent with the children, the more support the mother perceived she was getting from the father ( $r=.39$ ). The more children the mother had, the lower was the support in the coparental relationship ( $r=-.29$ ). Those with joint custody had a more supportive coparental relationship ( $r=.26$ ) than those with sole custody. If the separation had been a joint decision rather than initiated by just one of the parents, the coparental relationship was more supportive ( $r=.23$ ;  $p=.051$ ). Contextual variables which were not significantly related to the support dependent variable were months separated, years married before the divorce, mother's age, children's ages, and children's sex (see Table 12).

The Relation Between Contextual Variables and Conflict. The only variables explaining a significant amount of relationship conflict were the number of children ( $r=.25$ ), and the frequency with which parenting issues were discussed ( $r=-.23$ ) (see Table 12). The more children the mother had, the more conflict there was in the coparental relationship. The less often the parents talked, the higher was the conflict in the coparental relationship.

Variables which were not significantly correlated with conflict in the coparental relationship were socioeconomic data of all kinds, gender role preference, locus of control, months separated, children's ages, children's sex, mother's age, months separated, years married,

who initiated the separation, who had custody and how much time father spent with the children.

In summary, seven contextual variables (coparental role preference after divorce, time children spend with father, custody, initiator of separation, external locus of control, incomes of mother and father) had at least an independent significant correlation with the process variable; seven contextual variables (educational level, coparental role preference after divorce, number of children, time children spent with father, custody, initiator of separation, and frequency of discussions,) had at least an independent significant correlation with the support variable; and two contextual variables (number of children and frequency of discussions) were correlated with the conflict variable. These were the variables chosen for regression analyses.

Relation Between Process Variable and Outcome Variable. The negotiation score was significantly correlated with both support and conflict ( $r=.53$  and  $r=-.29$  respectively). The total negotiation score reflected successful negotiation style in that it was a combination of high cooperation and low competition items. The more successful the negotiations at the time of separation, the more support and the less conflict were reported in the current coparental relationship. The correlation between negotiation and support was stronger than the correlation between negotiation and conflict. Because the negotiation instrument measured the frequency of cooperative and competitive behaviors, those who were experiencing a lot of conflict probably did not interact as much as those who perceived the coparental

relationship to be supportive; therefore, the competitive behaviors were not occurring as frequently as the supportive behaviors. In Ahrons's study (1981), many reported that they attempted to avoid conflictual issues by not talking about some of their differences, especially in the areas of child-rearing practices and values. The negotiation instrument in this study was not as accurate in predicting conflict as it was in predicting support, perhaps because it was based on self-reported frequency instead of selected observations.

### Tests of the Hypotheses

#### Hypothesis 1

The context variables of socioeconomic status, nontraditional gender role preference, and internal locus of control will be positively related to successful negotiation. Stepwise multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the relationships between the significant contextual variables (coparental role preference, time father spent with children, custody, incomes of both mother and father, and who initiated the separation), which did not include two of the three originally hypothesized variables, and the negotiation or process variable. The time father spent with the children was the most important variable ( $B=.32$ ) (see Table 13), followed by father's income ( $B=.29$ ), and mutual (as opposed to either one or the other) initiation of separation ( $B=.27$ ). This equation explained 31% of the variability in negotiation style. When father spends more time with the children, he probably feels more involved, and is more cooperative with the mother. Also, if the decision to separate was mutual rather than one-sided, the interactions were



Table 13

Results of Stepwise Multiple Regression of Contextual  
Variables on Negotiation Style in the Coparental  
Relationship

Variable	b	SEB	Beta	T
Time father spends with children	2.00	.77	.32	2.60*
Father's income	3.67	1.55	.29	2.40*
Mutually initiated separation	12.80	5.95	.27	2.15*
(Constant)	109.83			

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .001$ .

Multiple R = .55

F = 6.93\*\*

R Square = .31

Standard Error = 16.49

more cooperative. Less unresolved conflict would be present in the relationship and the competitive strategies would not be as necessary.

But why is father's income a significant predictor of successful negotiation? Perhaps these fathers are better educated in how to be successful negotiators, or maybe they feel more secure as men and therefore do not need to compete with their former spouses. Perhaps having more money reduces their general stress level and allows them to be more willing to be cooperative. Of equal importance is the finding that mother's income was not a significant predictor for negotiation successfulness and neither was her educational level. Because mothers usually have more power in regard to the children (either through legal custody, by societal values which favor women as the primary parent, or by the children's attachment to her), their resource variables such as education, income, negotiation skills (Scanzoni, 1980) are not as critical in predicting how she negotiated at the time of separation. When fathers have more money, they are in a better position to bargain and do not have to escalate their negotiation strategies to win time with the children.

Hypothesis 1 was not supported. None of the mother's socioeconomic status variables were related to successful negotiation, but father's income was related. Mother's gender role preference was not related to successful negotiation, but perhaps father's time spent with the children is an indirect indication of mother's attitudes about coparental roles after divorce. Ahrons (1983) reported that the second most important predictor of fathers' involvement was the mother's attitude toward the father as a parent. Mother's internal

locus of control was not related to successful negotiation. It appears that the variables which do explain successful negotiation are related primarily to the father. This finding is another indication that data are needed from the fathers in order to further develop the conceptual model on decision-making during divorce.

#### Hypothesis 2a

Support in the coparental relationship will be positively related to socioeconomic status, a nontraditional gender role preference, and internal locus of control. Stepwise multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the relationships between the significant contextual variables (education, coparental role preference, frequency of discussions, time father spent with children, number of children, who initiated the separation, and who had custody) and the support variable of the coparental relationship. Frequency of discussions was the most important factor affecting coparental support ( $B=.44$ ), followed by coparental role preference ( $B=.38$ ) (see Table 14). This equation explained 40% of the variability in support. None of the other variables had significant Beta weights.

The frequency of discussion was measured by asking, "How often do you and your former spouse discuss parenting issues now?" Therefore the cause and effect relationship between frequency and support is not clear. Did the supportive relationship encourage more frequent discussions, or did the more frequent discussions increase perceived support? There were several women who talked frequently with their former spouses but had highly conflictual relationships. Most women talked more often and perceived more support, but some talked more

Table 14

Results of Stepwise Multiple Regression of Contextual  
Variables on Support in the Coparental Relationship

Variable	b	SEB	Beta	T
Frequency of talks	1.06	.27	.44	3.86**
Coparental role Preference	2.81	.85	.38	3.32*
(Constant)	5.57			

\*p&lt;.01. \*\*p&lt;.001.

Multiple R =.64

F=16.32\*\*

R Square =.40

Standard Error =3.38

often and seemed to get a charge out of derogating their former spouses. They actually sought out times to talk with them to argue and confront them with bad parenting. The cause-and-effect relationship could have been clarified by changing the temporal order and asking about how often they discussed "then" instead of "now". Ahrons (1981) also found that parents who interacted most frequently perceived their relationship as mutually supportive.

Those women who believed that parenting after divorce should be shared (as compared to those who believed in more mother control) were probably more supportive to their former spouses and therefore felt more supported by them. Ellison (1983) reported that the most striking characteristic of those divorced couples rated as having high parental harmony was their conscious decision to overcome their marital difficulties in order to meet their parenting responsibilities.

Hypothesis 2a was accepted in part. Mother's educational level was not quite significant enough to be included in the equation ( $B=.24$ ;  $p=.056$ ). The nontraditional attitude about coparental roles after divorce was positively related to support. Internal locus of control was not related to support. The frequency of talks was the most important variable and was not originally included in the hypothesis even though Ahrons's research (1981) had found this to be true.

#### Hypothesis 2b

Conflict will be inversely related to socioeconomic status, nontraditional gender role preference, and internal locus of control.

Stepwise multiple regression analyses were performed to determine the relationship between the significant contextual variables (number of children and frequency of talks), none of which were included in the original hypothesis, and the conflict variable of the coparental relationship. Neither of the variables was accepted into the regression equation. Not only was hypothesis 2b rejected, but conflict could not be explained by other variables available in the data.

### Hypothesis 3

Successful negotiation style (high cooperation, low competitiveness) will be positively related to quality of coparental relationships. Negotiation was added to the stepwise multiple regression analysis to determine the relationship between the contextual variables, the process variable and the support variable of the coparental relationship. Successful negotiation was now the most important factor affecting support in coparental relationships ( $B=.43$ ), followed by frequency of coparental discussions ( $B=.29$ ), mother's educational level ( $B=.28$ ), and number of children ( $B=-.23$ ) (see Table 15). This equation yielded an R-square of .57, indicating that the entire equation explained 57% of the variability in support.

Adding the negotiation variable increased the percent of variability explained by 17%. The Beta weights clearly revealed that negotiation style was more important than the contextual variables in explaining support. In other words, coparental relationship support was related to successful negotiation, frequent coparental discussions, mother's higher educational levels, and fewer children.

Table 15

Results of Stepwise Multiple Regression of Contextual and  
Process Variables on Support in the Coparental Relationship

Variable	b	SEB	Beta	T
Negotiation style	.10	.02	.43	4.28***
Frequency of talks	.70	.26	.29	2.72**
Education	1.05	.39	.28	2.70**
Number of children	-1.26	.54	-.23	-2.32*
(Constant)	5.51			

\* $p < .05$ .    \*\* $p < .01$ .    \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

F=15.44\*\*\*  
Multiple R = .76  
R Square = .57  
Standard Error = 2.92

A successful negotiating style, just as process theory postulates (Ellis, 1971), does allow both parents to participate in creating their own norms through negotiation, and these negotiations lead to more satisfying lives because more support is present in the relationship. The variety of living styles and child care arrangements among the women in this study with supportive relationships also suggests that those coparents did negotiate for the best arrangement for that family without feeling bound by society's norms for "divorced families."

When negotiation was added to the regression analyses, coparental role preference was dropped. Negotiation was the more powerful predictor and there was obviously much overlap between the two: attitudes about sharing parenting was related to being more cooperative in negotiating ( $r=.40$ ). Because negotiation explained such a significant amount of the variability, two other variables became significant contributors to the equation after negotiation entered. (As the amount of unexplained variability became smaller, the near significant variables in the previous equation could now explain a significant percentage of the remaining variability [Kerlinger, 1973]).

The more educated mothers were more aware of the importance of facilitating the children's relationship with their father. Fewer children probably meant less emotional and financial strain, so the fathers would sense less strain and be more supportive to the mothers. The mothers with more children could have had more role overload, and therefore perceived less support from the fathers because the support



was not enough. Divorced women were found to have greater adjustment problems when there were three or more children present (Pearlin and Johnson, 1977).

Next the process variable was added to the stepwise multiple regression analysis to determine the relationship between contextual variables, the process variable and the conflict variable of the coparental relationship. Successful negotiation was the most important factor affecting coparent conflict ( $B = -.31$ ), followed by number of children ( $B = .28$ ) (see Table 16). This equation yielded an R-square of .16, indicating the the entire equation explained 16% of the variability in conflict. While the contextual variables alone were not able to predict conflict, once the process variable was added, 16% of the variability in conflict could be explained. In fact, negotiation brought with it another variable, number of children. Having more children, as was discussed in the support model, was associated with more conflict.

In summary, these regression analyses emphasized the importance of the process variable and were much better able to predict the factors affecting support than the factors affecting conflict in the coparental relationship. Fifty-seven percent (57%) of the variability in coparental support was explained using negotiation style, frequency of talks, mother's educational level, and number of children. Only 16% of the variability in coparental conflict was explained using negotiation style and number of children. None of the contextual variables which affected negotiation affected either support or conflict. Only one of the contextual variables, attitude about

Table 16

Results of Stepwise Multiple Regression of Contextual and  
Process Variables on Conflict in the Coparental Relationship

Variable	b	SEB	Beta	T
Negotiation style	-.05	.02	-.31	-2.33*
Number of children	1.04	.50	.28	2.08*
(Constant)	13.13			

\* $p < .05$ .

Multiple R = .40  
R Square = .16  
Standard Error = 2.81

F = 4.52\*

coparental roles after divorce, was included in both equations, when the process variable was the dependent variable and when outcome was the dependent variable in the regression equations. When the process variable of negotiation was added along with the independent variables in the support model, attitudes about coparental role was deleted and two other variables were added. This probably indicates overlap between attitudes about coparental roles after divorce and negotiation style. In other words, parental attitudes favoring sharing the children occur along with increased successfulness in negotiation.

#### Hypothesis 4

The process of negotiation style will be more predictive of quality of coparental relationships than will be the context variables. A path analysis was completed to estimate the direct and indirect effects of the contextual variables on the outcome variable, in other words, to determine how much negotiation style contributed to or changed the effect of the contextual variables on support/conflict in the coparental relationship. Path analysis involves the separation of the total effect of one variable on another into direct and indirect effects (Alwin and Hauser, 1975).

Each of these effects were determined for support and conflict. Table 17 shows the separation of the total effects of contextual variables on support into direct and indirect effects. Figure 5 is a diagram of the direct path effects. Most of the effects of the contextual variables were direct, as seen by the magnitude of the direct path coefficients as compared to the indirect coefficients. For example, the effects of frequency of discussions and educational

Table 17

Regression Coefficients and Beta Values: Separation of  
Direct and Indirect Effects of Contextual Variables on  
Support in Coparental Relationships

Variables	Total	Indirect	Direct
Frequency of discussions	0.832** (0.35)	.134 (.06)	0.698** (0.29)
Educational level	0.959* (0.25)	.055 (.01)	0.904* (0.24)
Number of children	-0.750 (-0.14)	.377 (.07)	-1.127* (-0.21)
Coparental role preference	2.068* (0.28)	1.104 (.15)	0.964 (0.13)
Negotiation			0.086*** (0.38)

Note. Beta values are in parentheses under the regression coefficients.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

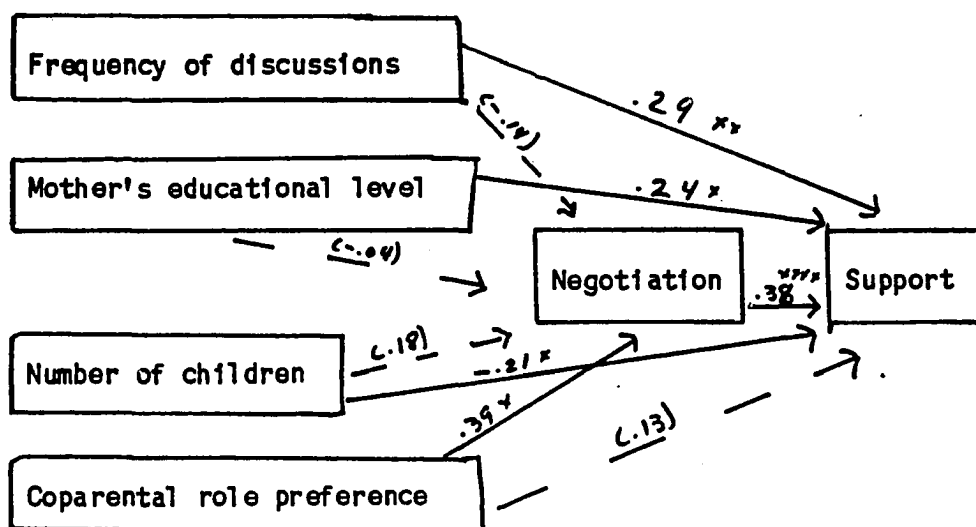


Figure 5. Path diagram of the direct effects (Beta weights) of factors on support in the coparental relationship. Significant paths are in solid lines; others are in dotted.

level were almost entirely direct (direct path coefficients = 0.698 and 0.904, respectively) while very little of their effects were transmitted by their influence indirectly through negotiation style (indirect path coefficients = 0.134 and 0.055, respectively). Also, the standardized coefficients or Betas for indirect effects were all very close to zero. This means that negotiation style did not mediate the effects of these two contextual variables on coparental support.

Over half of the effect on support of "attitudes about coparental role after divorce," however, was indirect and was mediated by negotiation (direct path coefficient = .964 [ $B=.13$ ], and indirect path coefficient = 1.104 [ $B=.15$ ]). The indirect effect was greater than the direct effect. Once negotiation was included, coparental role after divorce no longer had a significant direct effect on support. The number of children presented an interesting effect. A smaller number of children was more important to support in the coparental relationship when negotiation style was included in the equation, i.e. the direct effect was greater than the total effect. Number of children was not even a significant predictor until negotiation style was entered. This means that the negative effect of having more children on mother's perceived support is magnified by controlling for negotiation style.

Table 18 shows the separation of the total effects of contextual variables on conflict into direct and indirect effects. Figure 6 is a diagram of the direct effects. Most of the effects of the contextual variables on conflict were also direct. The standardized coefficients or Betas for indirect effects were very close to zero ( $-.07$ ,  $-.04$ ).

Table 18

Regression Coefficients and Beta Values: Separation of  
Direct and Indirect Effects of Contextual Variables on  
Conflict in Coparental Relationships

Variables	Total	Indirect	Direct
Frequency of discussions	-0.295 (-.18)	(-.107) (-.07)	-0.188 (-.11)
Number of children	0.766 (.20)	-.148 (-.04)	.914* (.24)
Negotiation			-0.045* (-.29)

Note. Beta values are in parentheses under the regression coefficients.

\* $p < .05$ .

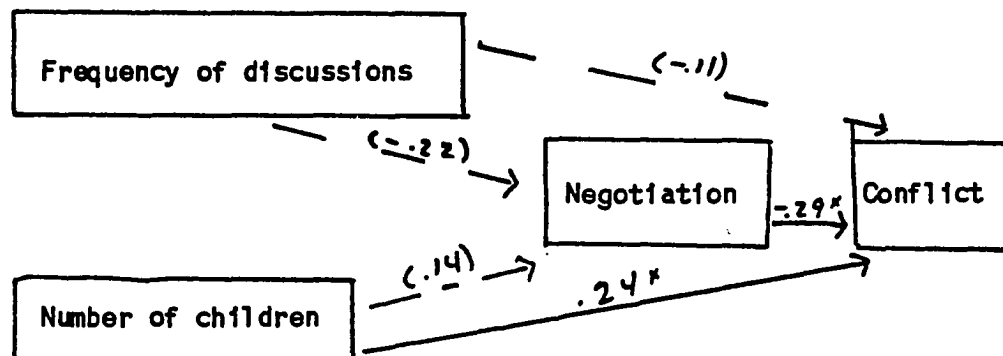


Figure 6. Path diagram of direct effects (Beta weights) of factors on conflict in the coparental relationship.

Significant paths are in solid lines; others are in dotted.



Here too, the number of children was more important to conflict when negotiation was included in the equation. The negative effect of having more children on conflict is magnified by controlling for negotiation style.

In conclusion, with the exception of attitudes about coparental roles after divorce, negotiation style did not seem to alter the impact of the contextual variables on the support and conflict in coparental relationships as evidenced by the small indirect effects in the path analysis. Negotiation style did, however, exert more influence than any of the other variables studied on both support and conflict in the coparental relationship.

#### Strengths and Limitations of the Study

Cromwell and Olson (1975) wrote about the need for family researchers to collect data from the entire family--using both self-report and observational methods. They were especially critical of self-report data and the use of women only samples. Others have also written about the need for divorce research to include both men and women (Ahrons, 1983; Kitson and Raschke, 1981; Safilios-Rothschild, 1969). Ahrons stated:

Much of our current knowledge about divorce is based on the responses of women. Measuring only women's perceptions of divorce may often provide a distorted picture. Researchers need to be cautious about collecting data from one spouse and making inferences about either the relationship or the other divorced spouse based on those data. To understand the coparental relationship requires information from both individuals who comprise the parental or former spouse subsystem. (p.67)

Acknowledging the importance of obtaining data from both spouses, Goldsmith (1981), however, found no significant differences in mother's and father's perceptions of amount of involvement they maintain with one another as parents.

This research study included only women. The rationale for excluding men was to omit gender as a variable (only five variables could be used in the statistical tests with a sample size of 50--which was kept low in order to do personal interviews). Further, the researcher is female and did all of the interviews, and it was felt that more rapport could be established with same-sex interviewees--especially in collecting rather sensitive data on relationship conflicts. Lastly, women were chosen instead of men because of the evidence that women continue to have custody in 90% of the court cases (Weitzman, 1981). Women spend more time with children and probably have more influence on the child's adjustment. The mother's attitude about the father has been found to influence the father's involvement with the child post divorce (Ahrons, 1983). Additional research should include the fathers, as well as other ethnic groups.

Still, self-report and the use of women only thus are major limitations of the present study. If the researcher had been able to observe separated or divorced couples actually negotiating about how to care for their children, instead of having to rely on the mother's perception and self-report of the process, the study would have been stronger.

Another limitation was the small sample size. A sample of 51 makes it difficult to use quantitative statistics to get meaningful

results. As noted above, however, the sample was kept small in order to collect the personal and complex data available only through interviews. The personal interviews encouraged a greater percentage of responders to complete the study, and there were no missing data.

There are also problems related to the kinds of instruments used in this study. Factor analysis of both the process variable and the dependent variable indicated that the items measured more than the originally assumed subscales. More testing for validity would strengthen those instruments. The reliability coefficients were quite good for both the process variable and the outcome variable.

The reason why regression equations were only able to explain a small amount of the variability in conflict, perhaps, lies in the way in which the process variable was measured. If the researcher had chosen to observe selected time periods when the separating couples were negotiating, perhaps the conflict would have been easier to document. One wonders, however, how many couples with highly conflictual relationships would allow themselves to be observed, or how different their negotiating process would be knowing that they were being observed.

Perhaps some of the other contextual variables suggested by Scanzoni and Polonko (1980) such as self-esteem, their feelings about the former spouses' past behavior, especially in regard to trust and resentment in the marital relationship, would help to explain conflict. Exploring the extent to which the "attachment bond" (Weiss, 1975) had been resolved might also help. Those who were attached would generate more conflict and be more sensitive to conflict in the

relationship. Kressel's four patterns of decision-making in divorced couples could be examined more closely (Kressel et al., 1980). He found that couples who exhibited the direct and disengaged conflict patterns fared better, both in mediation and in the postdivorce period. Couples exhibiting the enmeshed and autistic patterns were the most difficult for mediators to work with and had the poorest post-divorce adjustment.

Perhaps the way conflict was measured contributed to the difficulty. From the frequency responses to the conflict items (see Table 7), one can readily discern that there was not as much variability on those items as there was on the support items. Perhaps more variety in the conflict items is needed, or perhaps sampling smaller units of time in a qualitative style would increase the validity of the conflict instrument.

The strengths of the study included the use of random sampling for half of the subjects. Using only divorce court records and sampling respondents from a variety of geographical areas would strengthen the study results and the findings could be generalized. The personal interviews were a major advantage in obtaining more accurate information and in preventing problems caused by missing data. The rapport established by the interviewer facilitated their being more at ease in answering the questions. The women could ask for clarification and could be encouraged to answer items they may not have answered in a written questionnaire. Frequently data were volunteered which though not directly related to this study's objectives, will be invaluable in formulating other research designs.

Attempting to focus on process issues should be helpful for others trying to set up studies that focus on the "how" kinds of questions which need to be answered. In fact, the results of this study reinforce the importance of process in decision-making, as well as the importance of considering context, process, and outcome simultaneously.

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used, which enriched the quality of the results. This study was able to identify several factors that significantly affect support in coparental relationships and in fact explain 57% of the variability in coparental support. Much information was obtained on the kinds of coparenting issues that divorcing couples must deal with and on how successfully they are negotiating.

## CHAPTER V

## SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

This study was designed to determine whether and how support and conflict in coparental relationships, as perceived by mothers, was influenced by selected context variables (socioeconomic, gender role preference, and locus of control) and the negotiation process engaged in by separated or divorced spouses. Half of the study sample of 51 recently separated or divorced mothers were randomly selected and the other half were a convenience group.

A process-oriented model of decision-making using contextual variables, process variables, and outcome variables, developed by Scanzoni and Polonko (1980), served as the theoretical basis for the study. Data were gathered through structured interviews (see Appendix C) and a brief questionnaire (see Appendix E).

Statistical procedures used to analyze the data were Chi-square,  $t$  tests, factor analysis, alpha coefficients, Pearson's correlations, multiple regression, and path analysis. The respondents were mostly middle class in income, education, and occupational status, but the range was very wide. Over half the mothers had initiated the separation and had sole custody; however, joint custody was reported by more than a fourth of the women. One fourth of the mothers reported that their children spent more than 200 hours with their fathers during every month. Three fourths discussed coparental issues

with their former spouses at least every couple of months; less than one fourth rarely discussed the children.

A comparison of the random and convenience groups revealed differences between the two on 6 of 26 variables: marital status, method of referral, months separated, father's income, frequency of coparental discussions, and support. The convenience group had a larger number of separated women, had been separated fewer months, were referred by sources other than court records, had fathers with higher incomes, had more frequent coparental discussions, and reported more support from their former spouses.

Potential contextual variables available for inclusion in the model included socioeconomic data (income, occupation, education), gender role preference (as determined by the women in the home subscale of Brown and Manela, [1978]; and by a questionnaire on attitudes about coparental roles after divorce developed by the researcher), locus of control (Levenson, 1974), and several other variables (number, age and sex of children, mother's age, length of separation, initiator of the separation, years married, who had custody, time children spent with father, frequency of coparental discussions, and current dating patterns of mother and father).

Factor analysis on the process instrument revealed 15 factors, with low alpha coefficients for the first 4 factors. The alpha coefficient for the entire 52 items, however, was .90, so all of the items were used collectively as the variable to measure degree of negotiation success. The process variable (negotiation) contained items which reflected ways in which people talked and behaved with

each other--both cooperative and competitive styles. In responding to those items, the women were specifically directed to speak about how they were making decisions about child custody and care at the time of separation .

Factor analysis on the outcome variable, quality of coparental relationship, revealed four factors instead of the anticipated two factors. Alpha reliability coefficients helped to establish two variables--support and conflict--which were used for further analysis. The support and conflict variables were measured by a revision of Ahrons's (1981) scale, which contained 7 items; the respondents indicated how frequently their current relationship reflected the behaviors stated.

The coparental relationship reflected more support than conflict. Conflict was reported as occurring "often" or "always" by less than one fourth of the women, while supportive behavior was reported to occur "often or always" by a much greater percentage--approximately two-thirds. Over half the mothers reported being satisfied with how both parents were taking care of the children. About half indicated having almost total agreement with their former spouse about child care, and well over half reported that they were never unable to resolve disagreements. Three-fourths of the children were adjusting very well at home, and well over half were adjusting very well at school. As a final indicator of more support than conflict in the coparental relationship, only three women were planning to return to court for changes in child custody arrangements.



In making decisions about the children, cooperative strategies frequently reflected goal-directed talks, listening to each other, proposing a plan, using "I" statements in describing feelings, the mother showing consideration for the father's feelings, and both parents usually reaching mutually agreeable decisions.

Competitive strategies chosen most frequently were related to emotional rather than cognitive processes. For example, the father would assume he knew what the mother was thinking without clarifying, talks were strained, discussions were highly emotional, and the spouses got sidetracked to feelings about their personal relationship when trying to discuss the children. There was a general absence of violence in the decision-making strategies reported in this study. The more successful the negotiations had been at the time of separation, the more support and the less conflict were reported in the current coparental relationship.

Disagreements were about how the children's time was spent with the other parent, discipline, money, how to handle holidays, and a variety of other areas. Over 60% of the mothers were able to resolve disagreements all of the time. When making initial decisions about child custody and visitation, only three of the women had relied on an adversarial style of decision-making. This study reflected active negotiation between the coparents, which usually led to satisfactory outcomes.

Four hypotheses, to test a conceptual model for decision-making among separated or divorced parents, are discussed below.

Hypothesis 1 which predicted that the context variables of socioeconomic status, nontraditional gender role preference, and internal locus of control would be positively related to successful negotiation was rejected. Thirty-one percent (31%) of the variability in negotiation style, however, was explained by first, father spending more time with the children, followed by father's higher income and a mutual desire to separate. Since the variables which do explain successful negotiation are related to the father, this finding indicates that data are needed from the fathers in order to further develop the conceptual model.

Hypothesis 2a predicted that support in the coparental relationship would be positively related to socioeconomic status, a nontraditional gender role preference, and internal locus of control. Hypothesis 2a was supported except that there was no relationship between internal locus of control and the support variable. A stepwise multiple regression analysis revealed, however, that frequency of discussions was the most important factor affecting coparental support, followed by attitudes favoring shared parenting (a nontraditional gender role preference). Frequency of talks, the most important variable, was not originally included in the hypothesis. This equation explained 40% of the variability in support. Mother's educational level was almost significant enough to be included ( $p=.056$ ). None of the other variables had significant Beta weights.

Hypothesis 2b, which predicted that conflict would be inversely related to socioeconomic status, nontraditional gender role preference, and internal locus of control, was rejected. Not only

were these variables not accepted into the regression equation, but conflict could not be explained by any of the available contextual variables.

Hypothesis 3 stated that successful negotiation would be positively related to quality of coparental relationships. In stepwise multiple regression equations, negotiation yielded the highest Beta weight of all variables entering the equations for both the support and conflict models. Fifty-seven percent (57%) of the variability in coparental relationship support was explained by first, successful negotiation, followed by more frequent coparental discussions, mother's higher educational level and fewer numbers of children. Only sixteen percent (16%) of the variability in coparental relationship conflict was explained by unsuccessful negotiation and more children. A successful negotiating style, just as process theory postulates (Ellis, 1971), does allow both parents to participate in creating their own norms through negotiation, and these negotiations lead to more satisfying lives because more support is present in the relationship.

Hypothesis 4 stated that the process of negotiation style would be more predictive of quality in coparental relationships than would be the context variables. A path analysis was completed using the variables identified in the regression equations for support and conflict. With the exception of one of the variables (attitudes about the coparental role after divorce), negotiation style did not seem to mediate the impact of the contextual variables on the support or conflict in coparental relationships as evidenced by the small

indirect effects in the path analysis. Over half of the effect of attitudes about coparental roles after divorce was indirect and therefore altered by negotiation. Once negotiation was entered into the regression equation, attitudes about coparental roles no longer had a significant effect on support.

Negotiation was affected by variables which were not significantly related to either support or conflict. Negotiation style did, however, exert the greatest influence of any of the variables studied on both support and conflict in the coparental relationship.

### Discussion

#### Theoretical Implications

As one attempts to examine Scanzoni and Polonko's model in relation to whether or not this research affirms or contradicts it, the need to look for both context variables and process variables in the decision-making process seems obvious. There appear to be some variables which affect the process or are mediated by the process, but other variables seem to have a direct effect on the outcome and those affects are not mediated very much by the process. This research did not attempt to test all of the contextual variables suggested in their model. Other variables from their model which may need to be included in future research on decision-making in coparental relationships are race, age of father and ages of mother and father in relation to each other, first divorce or more than one, other interested parties (such as girlfriends, boyfriends, grandparents, or other relatives), a time frame of greater than 26 months, job status and security, level of

negotiation skill during the marriage, self-esteem, other measures of sex role preference, importance of the children to each one, feelings about the other parent--such as trust and resentment.

In considering which variables were important in this study to explain support in the coparental relationship, and in thinking about what else might be helpful in increasing the percentage of variability explained in support and conflict, some other theoretical considerations seem pertinent. The context in which negotiations occur is important. In this study, the importance of the contextual variables seemed to be that they elicited information about the meaning of the event for the individual. Symbolic interaction theory deals with the unique meaning that events have for people. According to that theory, the person's response is based on how they perceive the event, how important or salient something is to the individual.

It seems that the contextual variables which were the most important in this study were all getting at the meaning of the divorce and coparenting experience for the women. Increased education helped them to understand more about the meaning of life, relationships, divorce and the possibilities of a creative divorce. They could be more thoughtful, reflective, and consider the situation more objectively. The number of children also influenced their perception of the coparenting experience. More children meant more work for them now that they were a single parent. Discussions were more likely to occur if they perceived the event as something that could be worked out instead of devastation.

Perceiving the event from a helpless victim position will greatly influence the kind of negotiations. Looking at the variables which would measure the meaning of the event from a symbolic interaction theoretical perspective may give more meaning to Scanzoni and Polonko's model (1980). There are contextual variables, the subjective state, process variables and outcome variables. Additional study should include measurements of self-image, values about marriage and divorce, roles of women--especially role expectancy and role overload in regards to being a divorced parent. How does the person perceive the role transition and the new role as divorcee? How exchange theory works in divorced couples needs to be more fully researched. Bargaining, for instance, was not reported very often among parents who were divorced, but it is a major counseling strategy for working with married couples (Liberman et al., 1980). Perhaps a detailed examination of the level of moral development would also help to explain quality in the coparental relationship--especially if it helps to explain how the divorce experience is perceived by the couple.

The impact of new relationships kept occurring in this research but unfortunately there was no plan to systematically study that data. Some reported that the fathers were baby-sitting for mother to date. On the other hand, one mother had to get a recorder phone because her former husband was harrassing her with jealous accusations. Many of the mothers who were not talking with the fathers or who had a lot of conflict had made that decision based on father's infidelity or neglect.

Those women according to conflict theory could feel that the former husbands had taken something away from them. A gain for the former husband was a loss for them. They did not feel that they had a choice which Nye (1979) says is essential in exchange theory. The person who leaves the marital relationship makes a choice based on his or her alternatives but the spouse who is left feels only the loss. The spouse who is left may sense a violation of the norm of reciprocity: that people should help those who help them.

If there is much conflict and competition at the point of marital dissolution, it is much harder for interpersonal exchanges to take place in a fair negotiation. Although who initiated the separation was an important variable in this research, it was not one of the most important in the final prediction equations of support or conflict. Perhaps it doesn't matter if the decision to separate was the mothers or joint, but what was critical was if mother experienced marriage abandonment, and perceived herself in a victim role.

In Scanlon and Polonko's model, the cooperative and competitive strategies were discussed without reference to how they worked except that when cooperative strategies did not work, couples then accelerated into competitive strategies. In the factor analysis of the process variable in this study, there was a hint that couples have their own style of relating which consists of both cooperative and competitive behaviors used over and over again. The factors were loaded according to complementary styles of relating between the coparents. For instance, when he was violent, she was understanding. It did appear from the interview process also, that people had a style

of relating that included a particular cluster of traits. Kressel (1980) reported in his research with divorcing couples that certain patterns of relating (enmeshed and autistic) were the most difficult for mediators to work with and had the poorest post-divorce adjustment. Couples with the "direct and disengaged" conflict patterns fared better. His sample was small but also highlights the importance of recognizing the style of relating. The negotiation instrument used in this study is a beginning effort to identify and evaluate styles of decision-making among newly separated parents.

### Research Implications

Zartman (1976) theorized that flexibility is the key to negotiation. New rules, roles, and relations have to be worked out during the process of negotiation. The parents in this study were negotiating their own arrangements. Because the legal agreement was frequently different from the actual child-care arrangement, future research should not rely on the legal definitions of custody to explain child care. Although some research has concentrated on differences between joint and exclusive custody, this research suggests that that may not be the most productive focus. Custody was not one of the variables included in the prediction equations for support or conflict in the coparental relationship. The important variable appears to be how the coparents are negotiating, instead of the legal custody arrangement.

Some of the theory about divorce adjustment does apply to theory about coparental relationships, such as impact of numbers of children, importance of education, and current positive relationship with former



husband. Other variables which are related to divorce adjustment, such as initiator of separation, dating activity, and gender role preference had unclear relationships with coparental relationship quality in this study and need additional research. Some variables that did effect divorce adjustment were not related to coparental relationship quality such as, locus of control, and length of separation.

This study reinforced and added depth to much of the former research about custody and child care arrangements. The major areas of disagreement about child care were the same in this study as have been reported in the literature such as differences in childrearing beliefs and discipline, concern about how the other parent was behaving with the child, how to schedule holiday time, and children's reactions and adjustment to the divorce. Money and child support were not as much of an issue in this study, maybe because many of the women were financially secure themselves. That mothers were having fairly regular contact with fathers, and that the coparental relationship was more supportive than conflictual was found in this study along with several others (Ahrons, 1981; Goldsmith, 1981; Kurdek & Blisk, 1983).

Areas that were reported in this study that were not evident in other research were disagreements about appropriate kinds of health care for the children, and concerns about father's parenting ability. A specific concern about father's time with the children was how he was handling dating and remarriage and what effect this was having on the children. Additional research is needed to determine how, when, and under what circumstances to include children in the process so

that it is a meaningful instead of a stressful situation. The reactions of the children to their dating parents in this study were different than those reported by Irving (1984). Also, children are influencing how their parents respond to dating. This is another example of exchange theory; i.e., the children are helping to establish the norms.

Trying to look at context, process, and outcome variables simultaneously as Scanzoni and Polonko suggests seems desirable. This study was not nearly thorough enough in the selection of contextual variables. The gender role preference instrument probably was not valid because the roles were not appropriate for divorced women. A revision of that instrument needs to reflect the woman's work orientation and current thinking about the priority of family needs over the individual needs of any family member. The other measure of gender role preference, attitudes about the coparental roles after divorce, was quite useful in explaining quality of relationships and should be useful in further research on gender roles of separated or divorced parents.

Some of the most conflicted coparental relationships seemed to be influenced by a mother who had been a traditional housewife/mother, had been unable to find work, or felt like she shouldn't work outside the home with young children, and really resented the former husband who left the marriage. Maybe they were really quite scared about being able to survive--to support themselves. Perhaps it doesn't matter whose decision it was to separate, but if mother was left, did she perceive herself as victimized.

The inclusion of the locus of control instrument in this study was intended to measure "victimization", but it was not helpful in explaining either support or conflict. Maybe Levenson's (1974) instrument is too general to get at divorced women's perceptions of what has happened to them. The divorce experience may be perceived as an isolated one; she has control over her life except in that one area--her husband left. Doherty (1983) found that there was a temporary increase in the external locus of control for recently divorced women as compared to those remaining married.

A word of caution is due about using socioeconomic data of separated or divorced women. There was unpredictable lack of consistency in years of education, number of educational degrees, income and occupational status for the individual women.

Separated or divorced women are somewhat unusual in that many are just entering the job market, or they have years of education without a degree because they married and quit school or went into technical programs such as nursing. They may have had a good education but because they have not worked full time, they are not able to get occupations with high prestige immediately after the divorce. The finding from this study that level of educational attainment was a good predictor was also reported in divorce adjustment research by Goode (1956) Leupnitz (1982), and Pett (1982).

Because of a need to spend more time and energy with young children, some women in this study chose part-time employment or low paying or low stress jobs which made the income measure less predictable. Income may be a more important variable for fathers

since it did contribute significantly to the success of negotiation in this study. Some of the women with minimal education were making high incomes at independent businesses. Even figuring out how to code some of the occupations such as "housewife," "keeps small children in the home," or "fiction writer" was difficult using Hollingshead's occupation index. Perhaps it would have been better to ask if mother had a secure job position.

The frequency of coparental discussions turned out to be an important predictor of support in the coparental relationship. In future research, the temporal order should be clarified so that frequency of talks refers to "then" and not "now" as was the case in this study. One also wonders if frequency of talks would be as important to parents divorced for longer periods of time.

Several of the mothers had developed relationships with the father's new girlfriend/wife and were negotiating with them instead of the fathers. That was working very well in one instance but not working at all in another. This phenomenon was reported in Ellison's study (1983) but has not been discussed in the literature. Additional research on who else is involved in the negotiation process seems indicated.

Several women were negotiating for children to spend more time with their fathers so that the mothers could have more freedom to date. Additional research could ask which parents were wanting to exchange child-care time for free time and for what reason; this focus could expand our knowledge about how exchange theory works in the coparental relationship. The women who cling tenaciously to the

children may not have other options for achieving love and affection. Perhaps this is how dating impacts on the coparental relationship. When there are new relationships, parents are willing to exchange time with children for time with other relationships.

As the above examples indicate, there was much evidence that the coparents were developing their own norms of behavior following separation or divorce. Scanzoni and Polonko's (1980) model emphasizes the process variable. The process variable or negotiation style instrument used in this study was the most important factor affecting the coparental relationship. The process instrument made up of cooperative and competitive items provided a reliable measurement of negotiation style. Most of the women were asked if their styles of relating were covered in the interview list of behaviors and few could add additional ones. It was difficult for some of the women to report on the frequency of negotiating behaviors. They chose to also share specific anecdotes. Also, some of them had changed their interacting style since the separation/divorce and had to be reminded to focus on "that time". It is doubtful that the data would be reliable if asked in paper/pencil questionnaire form without the clarifying and refocusing of a trained and supportive interviewer.

Two of the problems with the negotiation instrument were that it was based on recall, and frequency of behavior. If they didn't talk much at the time of separation, the frequency scores were lower. The ideal situation to measure negotiation would be to video-tape the interaction and use behaviors identified in this instrument to code the style of negotiation. This tool could be used as a before and

after evaluation measure for parents who are in some type of divorce therapy or mediation counseling.

Another problem with the process variable used in this study was that some of the behaviors labeled "competitive" in the conceptual model on decision-making may actually be helpful in coparental relationships. Those behaviors which said, "refuses to discuss issues" and "leaves the room when the discussions get strained," were identified by some of the women as helpful to the negotiation process. Sometimes that gave them a chance to cool off and handle their emotional reactivity. The crucial factor was not how often they used those behaviors, but what the end result was in the negotiation process. Some of those who were never able to distance were the ones with the most conflictual relationships.

Helping parents learn more successful negotiation skills could increase the quality of the coparental relationship. Certainly there is ample evidence in this study to begin doing research with divorcing couples where the focus is on more accurate identification of negotiation styles, and role-playing to increase cooperative relating strategies.

The need to improve the validity of a "quality of coparental relationship" measurement is especially obvious with the conflict subscale. The conflict items were all based on parents who have some contact with each other. For the women who are no longer in touch with their former husbands, these questions are difficult to answer. Also, the range of activity reflecting conflict is quite narrow. Other specific items should be included such as, "How often are you

unable to resolve disagreements? How often do you wonder about the child's safety when he/she is with the father? Do you question the child about his/her other parent's activities after a visit? Do you send messages through the child because it is easier than talking with the former spouse? How often does he forget about parenting agreements? How often does he fail to follow through with agreed upon plans for the children? Do you have concerns about how he handles relationships with other women when the child is with him?"

Another difficulty in measuring conflict is that many of the women in highly conflictual relationships are not accessible through usual sampling methods. A concerted effort may be necessary to find through the court system a convenience group of women who would participate in future research.

This research study was not very successful in identifying the predictors for conflict. Perhaps part of the problem also lies in the absence of variables which get at the attachment bond or feelings about the divorce. Sometimes the bitterness which feeds the conflict operates at such an unconscious level that is difficult to ascertain through direct questioning and would need to be inferred through systematic observations of the couple.

There are many ways in which conflict can be measured, including projective techniques with the children. Drawings which young children make of their family could be analyzed. On two occasions during this study, because the children were present and seemed to want to be included, they were asked to make a drawing of their family. The drawings revealed a lot of information.

Instead of asking for mother's judgment about children's adjustment, perhaps questions should have asked about specific behaviors. For instance, did your child's school grades drop, did the child cry more, have more depressed play, lose weight, have nightmares, get sent to the principal's office, have "accidents" or an increased number of illnesses. When there are adolescent children, were there more problems with aggression toward parents, alcohol and drug use, sexual acting out, trouble with the law, and speeding tickets. Data generated by Wallerstein and Kelly (1974, 1975, 1976, 1977) in their research on effects of divorce on children could be used to design specific behavioral questions.

The important role of fathers in the quality of the coparental relationship was evident even though no data were collected from them directly. All three of the contextual variables influencing negotiation were related to the father--his income, how much time he spent with the children and his role in the decision to separate. A very important next step in this research would be to interview the fathers.

#### Implications for Clinical Practice

Many of the women who participated in this study indicated that they had been or currently were in therapy. The following clinical interventions, based on this research, may be helpful to the therapists, who are working with the mothers experiencing marital separation today.

1. When divorced parents share parenting, they need to maintain contact to discuss parenting concerns. The children's adjustment may



depend in part on how the woman and her former husband are able to coparent. If the relationship is highly conflictual, individual counseling and avoidance of the former spouse may be preferable until the two can talk without undue conflict. Talking through a mediator or counselor may be necessary at first to resolve major conflicts.

2. Suggest and reinforce "cooperative" strategies as ways to resolve disagreements with maximum joint profits.

3. Encourage each family to decide what is best for them. Childcare arrangements should reflect the individual needs of that particular family. There is no right or wrong set of arrangements.

4. Encourage mothers to carefully consider when and under what circumstances they include children in relationships with significant others.

5. Encourage recognition that whether to have joint or exclusive custody is not as important as how the care of the children will be decided.

6.. Mothers may need encouragement to express their opinions about areas of parenting in which fathers are unaware. Its not necessary to convince the fathers to change, only to express their opinion and why.

7. Encourage mothers to make a conscious effort to negotiate more supportive coparental relationships. The women may need to be helped to relabel the meaning of the event before they can negotiate more cooperatively.

### Conclusions

This study has demonstrated that the way in which coparents negotiate about child care issues is the most important factor affecting support and conflict in coparental relationships. More cooperative kinds of strategies and less competitive strategies increase support and decrease conflict. Since more and more parents are sharing the children after divorce, whether they have joint custody or not, it is crucial for these people to be able to successfully negotiate to achieve satisfactory adjustment by all members of the family. There do appear to be differences between marital decision-making and decision-making after divorce. For example, bargaining, or offering something for something which is prevalent in marital decision-making, was not prevalent in divorced spouses.

This research has made a preliminary contribution to the understanding of support in the coparental relationship, but it has contributed very little to the understanding of conflict. A model of factors affecting the coparental relationship should include contextual variables, the subjective state, process variables, and outcome variables. The interrelationships between them are crucial to the understanding of coparental relationships.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**Telephone Format**

## TELEPHONE FORMAT

Hello, Ms. \_\_\_\_\_. I am Anne Fishel, a faculty member at UNC, Chapel Hill. I am also a student at UNC Greensboro working on a research study sponsored by the University at Greensboro. This study is about how separated/divorced parents made decisions about caring for their children. I got your name from \_\_\_\_\_. Would you have about 5 minutes to talk with me now about your possibly participating? or could I call you back at a more convenient time?

If you are willing to participate, I will meet you at a convenient time and place to do an interview which will last about 45 minutes. Also you will need to fill out a standard research instrument which asks for your opinions -- there are no right or wrong answers on any of the questions you will be asked. The entire process shouldn't take more than an hour.

There will be questions about what kind of custody arrangements you have made, and how you talked and behaved with each other to make those decisions. Because some of the questions ask about sensitive areas such as feelings, and behavior used to cope with those feelings, talking about this may arouse some emotional distress. After the interview is completed, I will be glad to answer any questions that you may have about the study. I have counseling experience and would be glad to give you equal time talking about your concerns, to

recommend books written on the subject, and/or to recommend counselors if desired.

You may be assured of complete confidentiality. Your name will never be associated with your answers. The results of this research will be mailed to you if you so desire. Your voluntary participation is essential to this project. You may ask not to be included now, you may choose not to answer any specific question, or you may stop at any time without any hard feelings or problems. Do you have further questions about what it means to be in this study? (Answer subject's questions) (Offer telephone numbers of School of Nursing, UNC-CH -- 966-3731, and the human research center at UNC-G -- 379-5878)

(If not willing): Thank you for being willing to talk with me about my study. I can appreciate your reluctance in deciding not to participate. Should you change your mind, you may reach me at 966-4279 or 383-4186. Thank you again.

(If willing): I need to ask you a few questions to determine if you fit with my particular study:

What is your Race? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have children? if so what are their  
ages? \_\_\_\_\_

How long since you separated the last time? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have any serious health problems? \_\_\_\_\_

Have you spent some time talking with your former spouse about child care/custody decisions? \_\_\_\_\_

(If subject doesn't meet criteria): Thank you very much for your willingness to participate and your time today, but in this study I'm only talking with women who\_\_\_\_\_.

(If meets criteria): I'm really pleased that you are willing to do this. Let's go ahead and schedule the time and place. What would be convenient for you? (Interviewer schedules interview and obtains directions for getting to participant's home or place of interview)

I will look forward to meeting with you on:

---

Date	Time	Place
------	------	-------

**APPENDIX B**

**Letter to Potential Subjects**



Date

Dear Ms. \_\_\_\_\_

I am doing a study sponsored by the University of North Carolina at Greensboro on how divorced parents made decisions about caring for their children. Your name was chosen in a random sampling of Durham County divorce court records, but I have been unable to reach you by telephone.

It is very important that I reach as many of the chosen group as possible so as to increase the value of my research. I need your help. I can meet with you at your convenience. Confidentiality is ensured.

If you would be willing to talk with me about possibly being interviewed for my study, I would be most grateful. I will also offer you equal time to discuss any of your concerns. Please call 383-4186 for further information.

Sincerely,

Anne H. Fishel, R.N., M.S.N.

Associate Professor, U.N.C.C.H.

Doctoral student, U.N.C.G.

**APPENDIX C**

**Interview**

1. ID Number(1-2) 1\_\_\_\_  
2\_\_\_\_  
3\_\_\_\_
2. Age and Sex of Children 4\_\_\_\_  
5\_\_\_\_  
6\_\_\_\_  
7\_\_\_\_  
8\_\_\_\_  
9\_\_\_\_
- Coding (sex on 4-5)  
1. 1 male, 2.1 female, 3. 2 males, 4. 2 females  
5. 1 of each, 6. 2 m & 1 f, 7. 2 f & 1 m,  
8. 2 of each, 9. 3+ all m. 10. 3+ all f,  
11. 3+ mixed sexes.
- Coding(age on 6-9 & 3. numbers of each)  
6. K. or less\_\_\_\_ 8. Grades 4-6\_\_\_\_  
7. Grades 1-3\_\_\_\_ 9. Grades 7-9\_\_\_\_  
3. Grades 10+\_\_\_\_
3. Mothers age (10-11) 10\_\_\_\_  
11\_\_\_\_
- 4a. Time since last separation (coded in months)  
(12-13) 12\_\_\_\_  
13\_\_\_\_
- 4b. Who initiated separation/divorce?(14)  
1. wife 2. husband  
3. mutual decision 14\_\_\_\_
5. Year of marriage (15-16) 15\_\_\_\_  
16\_\_\_\_
6. Who has (temporary) custody or major  
responsibility for children? 17\_\_\_\_  
1 mother  
2 father  
3 both  
4 neither  
5 unresolved
7. What are the arrangements about shared child  
care or visitation (how much time does your  
spouse spend with the children per month)? 18\_\_\_\_  
19\_\_\_\_

## Coding

- 1 less than 5 hrs. 2 5-20 hrs.  
3 21-50 hrs. 4 51-75 hrs. 5 76-100 hrs.  
6 101-125 hrs. 7 126-150 hrs. 8 151-175  
9 176-200 10 200+ 11 other (not monthly)

8. Decisions about that arrangement were made primarily by: 20\_\_\_\_
- 1 father 2 mother 3 courts
  - 4 both together with lawyer(s)
  - 5 both together with mediator or counselor
  - 6 both together without outside help
  - 7 no decision

9. When making initial decisions about the children, 21\_\_\_\_  
would you say you were:
- 1 active 2 passive

10. What was one area of child care that you disagreed about? Perhaps how to handle a holiday or child's birthday. (If no disagreement proceed on to next section)

Coding: 1. no disagreement 2. holiday  
3. birthday 4. money 5. discipline  
6. time with parents 7. other 22\_\_\_\_

11. What exactly did you say, did your former spouse say? i.e. What was your opinion and how did you present it?

Coding: 3 cooperative, 2 both or can't code, 23\_\_\_\_  
1 competitive/coercive

12. Did you try to influence your former spouse  
by saying: 24\_\_\_\_  
25\_\_\_\_  
1 It's best for the child(ren)  
2 It's best for me  
3 It's best for you  
4 It's best for everybody  
5 all of those (If more than one):  
6. 1,2 7. 2,3 8. 3,4 9. all but 1  
10. all but 2 11. all but 3 12. all but 4  
13. 1,3 14. 1,4 15. 2,4 16. None of them
13. What other ways did you try to influence your  
former spouse? 26\_\_\_\_

Coding: 3=cooperative 2=both  
1=competitive/coercive 0= None

14. How often would you say you tried to influence  
your former spouse by saying, "If you do this,  
then I, ll do that," etc. 27\_\_\_\_  
1 very often 2 often 3 sometimes  
4 seldom 5 never

In the next section, give interviewees the response card and say, "To each of the following ways that people talk to each other (there will be about 50), answer how often that response occurred in your talks with your former spouse when discussing the children. Don't relate these to general discussions-only when you were discussing how to take care of or share the child(ren). Think about the behaviors that occurred when you were initially making decisions about child custody/care.

(The frequency of response range is: none=1, some=2, a lot=3, mostly or usually=4)

- |  |         |
|--|---------|
| 15. Communication was open or trusting   | 28_____ |
| 16. Talks were goal directed (as opposed to not reaching a decision)                                   | 29_____ |
| 17. You listened to your spouse  | 30_____ |
| 18. Talks were strained  | 31_____ |
| 19. Your former spouse assumed he knew what you were thinking without clarifying it with you           | 32_____ |
| 20. He called you names such as dumb or stupid   | 33_____ |
| 21. Your discussions were highly emotional (as opposed to logical)                                     | 34_____ |
| 22. You would throw things at him  | 35_____ |
| 23. He listened to you   | 36_____ |
| 24. You praised his parenting ability  | 37_____ |
| 25. You assumed you knew what your former spouse was thinking/feeling without asking for clarification | 38_____ |
| 26. You called him names such as dumb or stupid  | 39_____ |
| 27. You cried during your talks  | 40_____ |
| 28. You pouted   | 41_____ |
| 29. You shouted during your talks  | 42_____ |
| 30. You repeated what you heard him say for clarification  | 43_____ |
| 31. He cried during your talks   | 44_____ |
| 32. He pouted during your talks  | 45_____ |
| 33. He praised your parenting ability  | 46_____ |
| 34. Your former spouse repeated what you said for clarification  | 47_____ |
| 35. You would propose a plan for discussion  | 48_____ |
| 36. When the discussions got strained, he left the room  | 49_____ |
| 37. He would throw things at you   | 50_____ |
| 38. When the discussions got strained, you left the room   | 51_____ |
| 39. Your former spouse would propose a plan for discussion   | 52_____ |
| 40. You used "I" statements in describing feelings about plans   | 53_____ |

41. He said to you, "How could you do this to the children?" 54\_\_\_\_\_
42. You tried to appreciate/ understand his position 55\_\_\_\_\_
43. He used "I" statements in describing feelings about plans 56\_\_\_\_\_
44. He suggested alternatives aimed at reaching compromises 57\_\_\_\_\_
45. He tried to appreciate your position 58\_\_\_\_\_
46. You said to your spouse, "How could you do this to your children?" 59\_\_\_\_\_
47. You suggested alternatives aimed at reaching compromises 60\_\_\_\_\_
48. You refused to discuss issues 61\_\_\_\_\_
49. You would tell your former spouse to shut up 62\_\_\_\_\_
50. He would refuse to discuss issues 63\_\_\_\_\_
51. You would get sidetracked to your feelings about the relationship 64\_\_\_\_\_
52. He would tell you to shut up 65\_\_\_\_\_
53. You would say, "Let's forget about it for now" 66\_\_\_\_\_
54. You tried to show consideration for his feelings 67\_\_\_\_\_
55. Your former spouse would say, "Let's forget about it for now." 68\_\_\_\_\_
56. Both of you usually reached a mutually agreeable decision 69\_\_\_\_\_
57. Your former spouse tried to show consideration for your needs 70\_\_\_\_\_
58. You would blame your former spouse 71\_\_\_\_\_
59. You would get madder & madder 72\_\_\_\_\_
60. He would belittle your parenting ability 3\_\_\_\_\_
61. He would blame you 4\_\_\_\_\_
62. He would get madder & madder 5\_\_\_\_\_
63. Your former spouse would hit you after a heated discussion 6\_\_\_\_\_
64. Your former spouse would treat you roughly in a physical manner (pick you up, squeeze your arm, etc.) 7\_\_\_\_\_
65. You would belittle your former spouses parenting ability 8\_\_\_\_\_
66. You would treat him roughly in a physical manner (slap, pinch, squeeze or pull hair) 9\_\_\_\_\_

67. Look on this card and give me the number which fits the category of your yearly income (all money from salaries--before deductions are taken out -- or other income from rent, dividends, alimony, child support). Use either the weekly, monthly, or yearly column. 10\_\_\_\_  
11\_\_\_\_
68. In what category was your former husband's income during the last year you lived together 12\_\_\_\_  
13\_\_\_\_
69. How many years of formal school did you complete? 14\_\_\_\_  
15\_\_\_\_
70. What type of work do you do? job title, and place of employment, things you do. (16-17) 16\_\_\_\_  
17\_\_\_\_
71. Please select the one description which best describes what you think, given all other things being equal, about the roles of mother and father following a divorce: 18\_\_\_\_
1. Mother should have custody and be totally responsible for the children. Father should not try to continue a relationship with the child(ren).
  2. Mother should have custody, and father should have visitation rights.
  3. Mother should have custody and be primarily responsible for child care. Father should have visitation rights and participate in making decisions about the children.
  4. Mother and father should share equally the responsibility for parenting the children (joint custody).
  5. Father should have custody and be primarily responsible for child care. Mother should have visitation rights and participate in making decisions about the children.
  6. Father should have custody, and mother should have visitation rights.
  7. Father should have custody and be totally responsible for the children. Mother should not try to continue a relationship with the children.



72. Please select the following description which best describes what you think about the roles of women and men: (Responses include strongly disagree=1, disagree=2, agree=3, strongly agree=4)

1. It should be the husband's duty to support his wife and family. 19\_\_\_\_\_
2. Mothers should put their children before themselves. 20\_\_\_\_\_
3. The needs of a family should come before a woman's personal ambitions. 21\_\_\_\_\_
4. A woman's place should be in the home. 22\_\_\_\_\_
5. Women with young children should not work. 23\_\_\_\_\_

73. How often do you & your spouse discuss parenting issues now? ( 1. every day, 24\_\_\_\_\_,  
 2. several times a week, 3. once a week,  
 4. several times a month, 5. once a month,  
 6. once every couple of months,  
 7. rarely or never)

74. The following questions relate to your relationship with your former spouse about parenting issues. Name the response which best describes your thoughts about the relationship: (Responses include always=5, often=4, sometimes=3, rarely=2, and never=1).

1. When you and your former spouse discuss parenting issues, how often does an argument result? 25\_\_\_\_\_
2. How often is the feeling tone between you one of hostility and anger? 26\_\_\_\_\_
3. How often is the conversation stressful and tense? 27\_\_\_\_\_
4. Do you and your former spouse have basic differences of opinion about issues related to child rearing? 28\_\_\_\_\_
5. When you need help regarding the children, do you seek it from your former spouse? 29\_\_\_\_\_
6. Would you say that your former spouse is a help to you financially in raising the children? 30\_\_\_\_\_
7. Would you say that your former spouse is a help to you emotionally in raising the children? 31\_\_\_\_\_
8. Would you say that you are a help financially to your former spouse in raising the children? 32\_\_\_\_\_

9. Would you say that you are a help emotionally to your former spouse in raising the children? 33\_\_\_\_\_
10. If your former spouse has needed to make a change in visiting arrangements, do you try to cooperate? 34\_\_\_\_\_
11. Does your former spouse try to cooperate with any changes you need to make? 35\_\_\_\_\_
12. Do you feel that your former spouse understands and is supportive of your special needs as a parent? 36\_\_\_\_\_
75. How satisfied are you with how both of you are taking care of the children? 37\_\_\_\_\_
5. very satisfied
4. satisfied
3. resigned or neutral
2. dissatisfied
1. resentful
76. How are the children adjusting at home? 38\_\_\_\_\_
4. very well 2. not too well
3. o.k. 1. pretty upset
77. How are the children adjusting at school? 39\_\_\_\_\_
4. very well 2. not too well
3. o.k. 1. pretty upset
78. How much agreement would you say you have now about child care? 40\_\_\_\_\_
4. almost total agreement
3. some agreement, some conflict
2. lot of conflict
1. we can't talk--too much conflict
79. In the past month, how many times were you unable to resolve disagreements about the children? 41\_\_\_\_\_
1. none 2. 1-2 3. 3-4 4. 5-6 5. 6+
80. Do you plan to ask the courts to make a decision about custody/visitation arrangements for the child(ren)? 42\_\_\_\_\_
1. yes 2. undecided 3. no

81. What is your current attitude about your marital status? (choose one best answer) 43\_\_\_\_\_

- 3. Looking forward to a new life as a divorcee
- 3. Am comfortable with (proceeding on to a) divorce
- 2. Am resigned to the inevitability of divorce
- 2. Am wishful that we could work out our differences and get back together
- 1. Feel resentful about the separation
- 1. Feel depressed about the separation
- other\_\_\_\_\_

82. People talk to each other in many ways. What different ways, if any, are you using now to deal with your former husband about the child(ren), that are more effective than when you first started talking about separation? 44\_\_\_\_\_

Coding: 3=more cooperative, 2=no difference,  
1=more competitive/coercive  
4=more self-confident, assertive

83. What is your current marital status? 61\_\_\_\_\_

1. separated 2. divorced 3. remarried

84. (How did the subject get referred?) 62\_\_\_\_\_

1. court records 2. friends of researcher  
3. counselors 4. lawyers  
5. newspaper ads 6. snowballing  
7. ministers

85. (Which group was this subject?) 63\_\_\_\_\_

1. convenience 2. random

86. Are you & your former spouse dating or involved with another person? 64\_\_\_\_\_

0. unknown 1. both dating 2. neither dating  
3. mother dating/father not  
4. father dating/mother not  
5. both have significant other  
6. mother has significant other/father dating  
7. father has significant other/mother dating  
8. mother has significant other/father not dating  
9. father has significant other/mother not dating

87. (Score Hollingshead's educational level)

65\_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX D**

**List of Income Categories**

Income Categories

<u>Category</u>	<u>Weekly</u>	<u>Monthly</u>	<u>Yearly</u>
1	less than \$96	less than \$416	less than \$5000
2	\$97-134	\$417-583	\$5000-6999
3	\$135-173	\$584-749	\$7000-8999
4	\$174-230	\$750-999	\$9000-11,999
5	\$231-249	\$1000-1,082	\$11,000-12,999
6	\$250-288	1,083-1,249	\$13,000-14,999
7	\$289-326	\$1,250-1,416	\$15,000-16,999
8	\$327-365	\$1,417-1,583	\$17,000-18,999
9	\$366-403	\$1,584-1,749	\$19,000-20,999
10	\$402-446	\$1,750-1,916	\$21,000-22,999
11	\$443-480	\$1,917-2,083	\$23,000-24,999
12	\$481-519	\$2,084-2,249	\$25,000-26,999
13	\$520-557	\$2,250-2,416	\$27,000-28,999
14	\$558-596	\$2,417-2,583	\$29,000-30,999
15	\$597-634	\$2,584-2,749	\$31,000-32,999
16	\$635-673	\$2,750-2,916	\$33,000-34,999
17	\$674-711	\$2,917-3,083	\$35,000-36,999
18	\$712-749	\$3,084-3,249	\$37,000-38,999
19	\$750-788	\$3,250-3,416	\$39,000-40,999
20	\$789-865	\$3,417-3,749	\$41,000-44,999
21	\$866-961	\$3,750-4,115	\$45,000-49,999
22	more than \$961 wk.	> \$4,115	> \$49,999

**APPENDIX E****Internal-External Locus of Control Questionnaire**

**DIRECTIONS:** This is a questionnaire designed to measure the degree to which you think you or others have control over what happens to you. There are no right or wrong answers. This is a measure of your personal beliefs. Circle the response which fits your attitude in each statement.

(7=Strongly agree, 6=moderately agree, 5=somewhat agree, 4=unsure, 3=somewhat disagree, 2=moderately disagree, 1=strongly disagree.)

1. Whether or not I get to be a leader depends mostly on my ability.(45)      7 6 5 4 3 2 1
2. I feel like what happens in my life is mostly determined by powerful people.(46)      7 6 5 4 3 2 1
3. Whether or not I get into a car accident depends mostly on how good a driver I am.(47)      7 6 5 4 3 2 1
4. When I make plans, I am almost certain to make them work.(48)      7 6 5 4 3 2 1
5. Although I might have good ability, I will not be given leadership responsibility without appealing to those in positions of power.(49)      7 6 5 4 3 2 1
6. How many friends I have depends on how nice a person I am. (50)      7 6 5 4 3 2 1
7. My life is chiefly controlled by powerful others.(51)      7 6 5 4 3 2 1
8. People like myself have very little chance of protecting our personal interests when they conflict with those of strong pressure groups.(52)      7 6 5 4 3 2 1
9. Getting what I want requires pleasing those people above me.(53)      7 6 5 4 3 2 1
10. If important people want to decide they don't like me, I probably wouldn't make many friends. (54)      7 6 5 4 3 2 1



11. I can pretty much determine  
what will happen in my life.(55) 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

12. I am usually able to protect  
my personal interests.(56) 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

13. Whether or not I get into a  
car accident depends mostly on the  
other driver.(57) 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

14. When I get what I want, it's  
usually because I worked hard for it.  
(58) 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

15. In order to make my plans work,  
I make sure that they fit in with  
the desires of people who have  
power over me.(59) 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

16. My life is determined by my  
own actions.(60) 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

I.D. Number\_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX F**  
**Consent Form**

## RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I agree to participate in the present study being conducted by Anne Fishel under the supervision of Dr. John Scanzoni, a faculty member of the Department of Child Development and Family of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I have been informed about the procedures to be followed and about any risks which may be involved. I have been informed that there will be questions about what kind of custody arrangements we have made, and how we talked and behaved with each other to make those decisions. Because some of the questions ask about sensitive areas such as feelings, and behavior used to cope with those feelings, talking about this may arouse some emotional distress.

The investigator has offered to answer further questions that I may have regarding this study, to spend time talking about my concerns, to recommend books written on the subject, and/or to recommend counselors if desired. A copy of the results will be mailed to me at the conclusion of this study if desired. I understand that I am free to terminate my participation at any time without penalty or prejudice. I am aware that further information about the conduct and review of human research at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro can be obtained by calling 379-5878, the Office of Sponsored Programs.

---

Month Day Year

---

Signature of Participant

☐ Check here if you would like a copy of the results mailed to you.

Address:

**APPENDIX G**

**Reference List for Participants**

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**APPENDIX H**

**List of Counselors for Participants**

## COUNSELORS

Gail Bridges, R.N., MSN 967-6100 or 489-6519

Judy Eastman, A.C.S.W. 942-2268

Bill Friedman, PhD in Psychology 493-1466

Lisa Munsat, R.N. MSN C.S. 929-7282

Erica Rothman M.S.W. 933-9437

Stan Smith M.S.W. 933-1308

Maxine Soloway M.S.W. 942-6673

The Women's Center Chapel Hill 968-4646

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**APPENDIX I****Frequency of Items Chosen From the Gender Role Preference Scale**



Percentage of Items Chosen by Frequency From Gender Role Preference

Score Scale (N=51)

Items	Mean	SD	Frequency			
			Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Should be husband's duty to support wife/ family.	2.4	.88	13.7	41.2	33.3	11.8
Mothers should put children before them- selves	2.5	.76	3.9	51	33.3	11.8
Family needs before woman's personal needs	2.6	.70	2.0	45.1	43.1	9.8
Woman's place in home	1.7	.72	41.2	47.1	9.8	2.0
Mothers with young child- ren shouldn't work outside the home	2.3	.77	13.7	52.9	27.5	5.9

**APPENDIX J****Factor Analysis Matrix of Process Variable**

Factor Analysis Matrix of Process Variable

Item Number	I	II	III	<u>Factors</u>		VI	VII	VIII
				IV	V			
15	-.72		.36					
21	.70							
23	-.69							
59	.68			.38				
29	.67	-.47						
65	.66			.34				
16	-.66							
20	.64							
58	.63	-.40						
46	.63			-.36				
57	-.62							
56	-.60		.38					
45	-.58							
52	.58	.46						
25	.58					-.38		
26	.58	-.38			-.39			
62	.55	.47						
49	.55	-.32			-.31			
36	.53	.31			-.33			
24	-.49		.31					
51	.48					.43	.38	
17	-.48	.44						
61	.46			.46	.39			
41	.46		-.32					
55	.42				-.40		.40	
40	-.42							

## Process Variable (con't)

Item Number	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
63		.76						
37	.31	.57		-.48				
64	.31	.56		-.55				
42	-.41	.53	.32			.33		
32		.51						
27	.30	-.43				.34		.36
48		-.42						.31
34		-.31	.62		-.31			
43			.61		.33			
36			.53				.34	-.40
66			.50			.36		
44		-.34	.48					
39	-.39		.40					
47	.35		.31	.57				
60	.45			.52			-.31	
31				-.51			.34	
33			.39	-.47	-.32			
38	.33				.52			.42
53			.32		.49		.34	
50	.36			-.44	.39			
54		.38			.53			
22					.34		-.43	-.33
28								.52
18	.46			.33				
35		.32	.35	.36				-.31
19	.37				.30			

## Process Variable (con't)

Item Number	IX	X	XI	Factors XII	XIII	XIV	XV
59			.30				
16	.32						
56					.32		
49	.33						
24							-.35
17	.33						
40				.33			
32	-.49						
43						.30	
44				.33		-.31	
39				.33			.35
31			.30				
33		-.32					
54		-.30				.35	
28	-.30						
18		.55					
35		.36					
19			.65				